

S E R M O N S

Preached before the

HONOURABLE SOCIETY

OF

L I N C O L N ' s - I N N ,

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VOL. I.

THE SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N :

Printed for T. BECKET and P. A. DE HONDT,
near Surry-Street, in the Strand.

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S E R M O N . I.

The Advantages of Religious Meditation.

GENESIS xxiv. 63.

*Isaac went out to meditate in the Field,
at the Eventide.*

IN the days of early innocence, and patriarchal simplicity, nature had a kind of dominion in the heart of man which she seems now, in a great measure, to have lost. While he was attentive only to the gratification of real wants, and found them supplied by her common bounty, he could not fail to love so kind a benefactress.

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But

But through the refining arts of society this simple attachment to nature has been destroyed. When artificial wants were discovered, which she *alone* was no longer able to gratify, man withdrew his affection from her, and art and avarice took place of love and simplicity.

This change is not only to be lamented, as productive of miseries which man was not made to suffer, but as destructive of that pure and reasonable devotion, which the love of nature was intended to inspire.

Was it not intended that this love should lead us to the adoration of God? Why then are his works so formed for admiration and delight? Why then such
order,

order; such beauty, such proportion in every part of the creation? Why is the eye delighted with variety of colouring, and why are light and shade so admirably mingled to produce that variety? Why are our senses affected by fragrance or beauty, by symmetry or magnificence? Why do we rejoice to behold the glories of a rising, or a setting sun? and why do we feel an awful kind of pleasure, when we behold the expanse of heaven covered with innumerable stars?—The reason is obvious: The God of Nature formed our senses to be affected by these objects, that, under the influence of love and admiration, we might learn to adore the wisdom that created them.

Since then the contemplation of the visible works of Providence seems to

have been intended as a motive to rational devotion, we should do well to allot some time for exercises of this nature, and accompany the Patriarch *at eventide to meditate in the field.*

To indulge this contemplative disposition must be more immediately necessary for those whose lives roll in the circle of fashionable dissipation; who seem to think that the only end of their being is amusement, and have not the least idea of those indispensable duties, by which they are bound either as sociable, or as dependent creatures.

Did they sometimes meditate on the works of eternal wisdom, and soberly consider the end of their existence, would they conclude it to be the proper employment of a rational creature to divide

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it's life between dress and dancing, between sleep and play—to fly from one amusement to another, while art has any new expedient to flatter luxury, and while the invention of poverty can administer to the wants of wealth?

Did they ever contemplate the wisdom of that Being who gave them life, could they suppose that life to be given in vain? Could they conclude that a soul which can conceive the perfections of it's Creator, and which bears a shadow of those perfections in itself, should be created for no nobler purpose than an insect—to flutter awhile in the sunshine of festivity, and be no more?

Did they suspend the pursuit of pleasure to consider the social duties of man, would they suppose that the world was

furnished only for their particular entertainment; and that they had no other connections with, or engagements to their fellow-creatures, than as they were necessary to their ease or amusement; to contribute to their luxury, or gratify their pride? Would they not soon be convinced that those who have the greatest share of this world's goods are but more distinguished servants of the community; and the greater the power that has been committed to them, the more laborious must be their service, and the more extensive their charge?

Did they reflect on the duties of a dependent creature, would they not perceive the strong obligations which must bind a created being to the Author of its existence? Would they not conclude that, if acts of worship are the only offerings

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offerings we are capable of making our Supreme Creator, it is at least our duty not to neglect those——But when they were informed that the particular acts of obedience which God expected from them in return for their creation and preservation, were *to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with respect to him*——would they not, in those precepts, be struck with a general idea of their duty both religious and social, and be convinced that the latter was founded on the former?

Such reflections as these are certainly proper for Beings that are born to be accountable for the life that is lent them: But, how seldom do we yield admission to such reflections as these!——The world, the insinuating world has the art of engrossing our attention——Its objects still

prevail, however insignificant; nor is it sufficient that we have been once deceived: The cheat is still practised upon us; we are again disappointed, yet we embrace it again.

It is, therefore, convenient that we should sometimes retire from a scene of danger and dissipation—retire with Isaac into the field, and meditate.

Man, indeed, was not made for *perpetual* solitude—His powers, his dependencies, all declare against it; but *occasionally* to leave the business and the tumult of society—to retire into himself, and to *commune with his own heart*, whether, with the Prophet in his chamber, or with the Patriarch in the field, is not only expedient, but even necessary.

There

There is scarce any task so unwelcome to us as the review of our own minds, and hence it is that we are, in general, so little acquainted with the state of them. Our inclinations change insensibly, and the heart takes a different bias by imperceptible degrees; insomuch that when we come to compare our present conduct with what was our manner of life a few years ago, we are surprized to observe the difference, because we attended not to the progressive change of our sentiments and dispositions.

For this reason, we ought, by frequent meditation, to examine the *state* of our minds, to inquire how we stand affected to the great branches of our duty, by placing them respectively in view; but more particularly to make it our question, whether we are sensible of that pious gratitude

itude to our Creator, which is the first and best foundation of religious obedience.

Enquiries these are that demand the hour of privacy and recollection, when the passions are all obedient to the understanding, and even self-interest and self-love submit to the search of truth.

Then let us summon our hearts to their trial, when their specious advocates are at a distance; when they can derive no confidence from the flattering presence of worldly objects, and are no longer *barren* by the deceitfulness of sin.

For this, let me once more observe that, retirement is the proper scene. The world is an enemy that is not to be subdued, but by frequent retreats; we must contend with it as the Parthians of old

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old did with their adversaries, and fly, while we maintain the fight.

But in all our religious meditations there is one circumstance which we ought never to forget, and that is the *deceitfulness of the heart*. However closely or impartially we examine it; we shall hardly bring it to an open or an ingenuous confession. It has still some evasion, some apology, some palliating circumstance for every charge that is brought against it. If we place its deformities before it, it has the art of shifting the scene, and of displaying its supposed perfections in their stead. If we charge it with some particular vice, or foible, it derives encouragement from comparison, and instead of acknowledging and amending its own faults, it sets itself at ease by considering the imperfections of others.

For

For this evil there is no better remedy than that which the Psalmist has recourse to, when he implores the assistance of that Being, who is properly called the Searcher of hearts. *The righteous God, says he, proveth the heart:—His eyelids try the children of men—Examine me, O Lord, and prove me: Try my reins, and my heart. Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults.*

The author of these petitions was, exclusive of his inspired knowledge, by no means a stranger to the human heart. He had experienced its treachery: He knew its propensity to error, to folly and to vice. He knew that an enemy concealed under the mask of friendship was of all others the most dangerous,
and

and he considered his own heart as such. He was sensible that in this respect too he was liable to be *betrayed by his own familiar friend*, with whom he had likewise *taken sweet council*.

It is from the strongest convictions, therefore, that he applies to a superior power, and prays for deliverance from an enemy so insidious, and so near. Such, under the same circumstances, should be the conduct of every Christian. *If our hearts condemn us not*, yet let us pray for a more perfect knowledge of, and command over them, to that Being, who is *greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things*.

This will not only be the most effectual, but the safest method of self-examination;

amination; for when, with all becoming humility, we implore the assistance of God in that duty, we have nothing further to fear from the event of it, because we have done whatever was in our own power towards it.

These are reflections which naturally arose upon the subject of religious meditation. — Let us now turn our eyes a moment on the contemplative Patriarch. He *went out*, we are told, *to meditate in the field at the eventide*. This was at the most critical juncture of his life; for he was now in expectation that the divine promise would soon be fulfilled in a circumstance of no less consequence than that of giving him a wife, in whose offspring all the generations of the earth were to be blessed.

With such glorious and exalted views, it was natural for him to retire, and indulge his thoughts in private. Great joys, like great sorrows, love to be alone, and a *stranger doth not intermeddle with them*. It is, therefore, with the greatest propriety that the historian represents Maac upon this occasion as retiring into the field for meditation.

The probable subject of his reflections was nothing less than the accomplishment of the divine promise—a subject, in every respect, the noblest, and the most delightful that the human mind is capable of contemplating! To the Patriarch it must have been particularly so upon this occasion, for while he was yet meditating on those promises, he beheld them accomplished.

With

“ He

“He lift up his eyes and saw, and,
“ behold, the camels were coming.

“ And Rebekah lift up her eyes, and
“ when she saw Isaac, she lighted off
“ the camel.

“ For she had said unto the servant,
“ What man is this that walketh in the
“ field to meet us ? And the servant had
“ said, It is my master.”

As it will not be a far-fetched, so I hope it will not altogether be an useless exhortation, if I recommend it to you, while you walk through the field of this life, like the Patriarch, to make the promises of God the subject of your meditation. You have, you will say, no personal or particular promises, such as the son of Abraham was favoured with. — That may be true — but how much

greater, how much more glorious are your expectations than his? His were confined merely to the long succession of an earthly posterity, but you look up to an inheritance of immortality, to *an house not made with hands, incorruptible in the heavens.* These magnificent promises you have from the same gracious Power, in whom the Patriarch *trusted and was not deceived; whose hand is not shortened that it cannot save,* and part of whose glorious character it is, that *he keepeth his promise for ever.*

Through every period of this uncertain life let us constantly meditate on the eternal promises. The eventide will soon come, when, like Isaac, we shall see them accomplished——when we shall meet that everlasting love which first brought us into this state of being, and shall finally remove us from it. Let

this be our *strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of our souls, steadfast and immoveable.* This hope it was that supported our fellow-christians in all the painful conflicts of their spiritual warfare: And it is this that must afford us the only reasonable consolation under every distressful, or discouraging event.

“ Why art thou so full of heaviness,
 “ O my soul! And why art thou so
 “ disquieted within me? Trust in God.”
 —Repose on his infallible word, his immutable promises; and in every various situation of life the ETERNAL PROVIDENCE shall *never fail thee nor forsake thee.* Whether thou art in the city, or whether thou art in the field; *blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field.*

S E R M O N II.

The Resurrection of Lazarus.

LUKE xi. 44.

He that was dead came forth.

THE resurrection of Lázarus not only affords a firm proof in favour of Christianity, but exhibits a very pleasing picture of its amiable Author. While we read the story, the miracle itself does not so much engage our attention, as the circumstances of tenderness that lead to it: We admire that

divine power which could re-animate the dead, but the sensibility of friendship carries away our hearts: And, when we behold that divine Person who entered into this state of Being for the benevolent purpose of our redemption, melting under the tender sensations of friendship, that reverence we owe to the dignity of his character forgets itself in affection.

The story of Lazarus is recorded by that beloved disciple who was eminent for his sensibility and affectionate disposition. Hence it is that we find it related with all those tender circumstances that await the event of death, when female softness bewails the loss of a brother, and friendship is a mourner at the grave.

The

The sacred writer opens his story with the sickness of Lazarus, and distinguishes him as the brother of that pious woman, who had *anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair.*

These good offices justly entitled her to call upon him for his assistance in a case where he might be eminently serviceable. She, therefore, with her sister, *sent unto him, saying, Lord, he whom thou lovest, is sick.* The historian has not mentioned the purpose of this message, but it was sent most probably with the hope of what some of the Jews present suggested afterward, that he *who opened the eyes of the blind, could cause that this man should not die.* At the same time it might be hoped that the consolations of friendship would afford some relief to their afflicted brother; for the pity of those

we love has power to soothe the heart, even while the body labours under the languor of sickness.

But whatever might be the purpose of the message, it had not the effect which was, undoubtedly, expected from it; for Jesus did not immediately go to Bethany, though *he, whom he loved, was sick*. Yet why? — why were the kind offices of friendship refused, at a time, when they were wanted so much? Or why was that healing power, which had been so effectually and so generally exerted, suspended, in a case where affection, and even gratitude, appeared to demand it? Could he, whose benevolence was universal, who could restore the daughter of the Syrophenician woman—could he withhold that aid from
a friend

a friend which he so liberally gave to strangers? How could he suffer *him whom he loved* to languish to death? How could he, after *he had heard that his friend was sick, abide two days still in the same place where he was?* The reason for this he assigns himself, viz. that it was *for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.*—Yet it was not only for the glory of God, but for the benefit of the sufferer. When by such an astonishing proof he was convinced of the divine nature of his friend, with what joy must he have returned from the regions of death? With what certainty of faith must he have confided in his Redeemer? How inexpressibly delightful must those reflections have been which told him he had an interest with that all-powerful Being, who could bring back life from the

womb of destruction?—Who could restore the cold and insensible body to all its faculties and functions, and *lighten those eyes, that had slept the sleep of death?* Were *the sufferings* of a transient sickness *to be compared with the glory* that was thus *revealed?* The friends of the deceased, moreover, his sorrowing sisters had not only the joy of beholding their brother restored to life, but received from this event that confirmation of their faith which would from thenceforth be an unfailing source of happiness.

Thus it is that the gracious God dealeth with the children of men. He is in nowise the author of their sufferings. They flow from moral, or, as the sickness of Lazarus did, from natural causes.—But how oft does the divine Providence bring good out of evil!

And

And how frequently, through his gracious interposition, is our sorrow turned into joy!

Upon these principles did the friend of Lazarus forbear to visit him during his sickness; but when by his divine knowledge, he found that he was dead, *Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, says he, but I go that I may awake him.*

It appears that the disciples too had a regard for this amiable man, which was the reason why their master did not, out of tenderness to them, express himself clearly on the death of Lazarus: It appears so, and it is evident; for when *he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,"* Thomas exclaimed with pathetic sorrow, *Then let us go that we may die with him.*

him. "Alas! is our friend Lazarus dead? Is he that loved us no more? What is there in this world that is *now* worth living for? Is there yet another Lazarus? Another that will love us? None, none! *then let us go, that we may die with him.*" These are the natural complaints of surviving friendship, when those, who are dearer to us than life itself, are irrecoverably torn away by the hand of death. Nor does it appear, as Thomas met with no rebuke for his exclamation, that these complaints are disagreeable to Providence. They are considered, no doubt, as the unavoidable effusions of passions that are in themselves blameless; and sorrows of this kind are then only culpable, when they grow into habitual murmuring.

But

But let us now accompany the mourning disciples and their master to visit the afflicted sisters, and the tomb of Lazarus. *Martha*, says the Evangelist, *as soon as she heard of the coming of Jesus, went and met him, and said, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.* This seems to be a modest and unaffected complaint that Jesus had not visited his friend during his sickness; but it was, at the same time, an acceptable instance of faith, which indeed she proves to be very great, when she adds, *I know, that, even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.* As a reward for this distinguished faith, Jesus immediately tells her that her brother should rise again; and when she supposed that he alluded to the general resurrection, he takes an opportunity from thence to inform her of his own important appointment; and the superior privileges of those that believe in

in him. *I, says he, am the resurrection, and the life; whosoever believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die.* This was, indeed, a glorious declaration, and properly expressive of his divine mission, who brought *life and immortality to light.*

But Martha was not the only one who made a confession of faith on this occasion; the Jews, who came from Jerusalem to pay their visits of condolence, made it their question, whether he, *who opened the eyes of the blind, could not have caused that even this man should not have died.* Strange! that the Jews should admit such a supposition, who were, in general, remarkable for their infidelity, and from whose persecutions Jesus had so lately been obliged to fly. Nay, it is evident

evident that he now returned to Bethany with caution and secrecy on their account, from the reception he met with, and the private audience he appears to have had of Martha and Mary. Is it not strange then, I say, that these Jews should drop any thing like an expression of faith? Certainly it appears so, but, perhaps, it may be accounted for thus.

The mind is never so willing to let go its prejudices as at those times when sorrow, or mourning, or the evils of life take hold of it. Scenes of affliction and distress subdue the pride of the heart, and obtain admission for piety and truth. Now these Jews really condoled with the sisters of Lazarus, for the Evangelist tells us they wept; and this, therefore, was a proper season for faith to gain the ascendant of prejudice.

When

When Jesus joined this family of mourners, *he groaned in the spirit*, says the sacred writer, *and was troubled*; but when he came to the tomb where his departed friend was laid—*he wept*. He could no longer resist the tender sensations of friendship, and though he knew that, the next moment, he should see Lazarus restored to life, he could not look on that body, which contained a heart that once had loved him, without a tear. *Jesus wept*. The Son of God beheld with tears that body inanimate to which he was now about to restore the faculties of life.—Yet as a man, and as a friend he wept. Jesus wept—but it was at the grave of friendship: And the tears that fall on such a grave are the tears of virtue. That fortitude, which refuses the tribute of mourning *there*, differs not from insensibility. It is gratitude

tritude to weep over a departed friend :
I had almost called it piety—The an-
cients did give it that name.

Jesus wept—He, who brought eter-
nal life to his creatures, wept that one
should die! Who knows what passions
might, at that moment, agitate his sacred
bosom? Who knows whether, as he
looked upon his lifeless friend, he did not
revolve in his gracious mind all the mi-
series to which mankind are subject ;
all the various evils of life, and death,
the last and greatest evil? Who knows
whether some of those tears that fell over
the grave of Lazarus were not excited
by reflecting on the ruin of human na-
ture, that nature which he had taken
upon him, and which it was his purpose
to restore to the original privilege of life?

Thus

Thus the divine Benevolence indulged the sweetest and most amiable of all human sensations, the tenderness of pity and friendship.

But the time was now come, when he should exert his power—*Father I thank thee, says he, that thou hast heard me, and I knew that thou bearest me always: but, because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.* This was a very solemn introduction to the great miracle he was about to perform; and it must have rendered the effect of it still more striking to the people, when they beheld the immediate power of God obedient to the prayers of this divine man. Accordingly *when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, "LAZARUS COME FORTH."* Let us for a moment imagine ourselves at this solemn scene—Behold! what various degrees

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of curiosity and expectation are written upon the faces of those who *stand by!* See, how full of expression is every feature at this critical moment when the dead is called upon *to come forth!* Methinks I behold on one countenance the firm confidence of faith, and on another the suspension of doubt; while a third expresses the carelessness, and half-concealed scorn of disbelief. One is attending with eager eyes to mark the first symptoms of returning life, while another is smiling at the vain confidence and credulity of his neighbour. The son of God himself stands over the grave with looks expressing the assurance of his efficacious power; but marked, at the same time, with the pleasing expectation of soon embracing his reviving friend.—But the sisters, the faithful and affectionate sisters—See with what anxious eagerness

they bend over their brother's grave! See how trembling expectation waits for the first signal of life! In this case *perfect love* doth *not cast out fear*, nor doth faith itself attend the issue without wavering. See how their eyes strain to catch the returning sense! Hah! it returns—the colour returns to the pale lips—They move—The blood wanders over the countenance—The eye balls move—The eye-lids open—He lives—Lazarus lives—Need we pursue the scene further? Need we dwell upon the cordial effusions of grateful friendship, or the tender embraces of brotherly love? These circumstances we need not exhibit, as they are obvious to every imagination.

From the contemplation of such wonderful events as these we may derive much

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much religious improvement. They animate our devotion, confirm our faith, and even exalt our ideas of that glorious Being whom we serve. At the same time scenes of pathetic tenderness, where the gentle affections are exercised and called forth, soften and subdue the mind: They redall us from the idle pursuits of festivity, or the more laborious vanities of false ambition.

Who, that contemplates the lamented death of Lazarus, but would rather wish that his remains might be embalmed by the tears of private friendship, than that the report of his death should spread from region to region, and be heard with indifference, till it was heard no more:

—Who, that considers the miraculous circumstances of his resurrection, would think it worth his while to labour for the

interest of any power but that which shall re-animate the dead?—Is it possible to reflect on the story of Lazarus, and not wish to have partaken of that tender affection which wept over his grave?—

To have been distinguished by the favour of that gracious Redeemer who feels so tenderly for the sufferings of his creatures, who died for their sins, and rose again for their deliverance from the grave? If it be natural to form these wishes, let us reflect that this Redeemer still liveth, and liveth to make intercession for us; that, like Lazarus, we may be distinguished by his friendship, and, like him, through his power, rise again from the dead.

NEVER was there a more just, or a more striking picture than that which is exhibited in these two short verses. It appears, indeed, from all the

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The different Conditions of
the Wicked and the Righte-
ous considered in some par-
ticular Views.

PROV. iv. 18, 19.

*The Path of the Just is as the shining
Light, that shineth more and more unto
the perfect Day.*

*But the Way of the Wicked is as Dark-
ness; they know not at what they stumble.*

NEVER was there a more just, or
a more striking picture than that
which is exhibited in these two short
verses. It appears, indeed, from all the

writings of the son of David that he had a consummate knowledge of human nature, and a deep penetration into the minds and manners of men: But in this passage he has even outshone himself, and has added to the solid truths of the moralist the strength of the poet's imagination.

I. The path of the just is as the shining light, And what wonder? Since his way is directed by that word of truth, which is *a lanthorn to his feet, and a light unto his paths*—Since he derives his intelligence from the fountains of eternal knowledge, and follows the guidance of infallible wisdom! Is it possible that darkness should fall upon his path, or that his life should be misdirected, while it is conducted by the rules of him who gave it? Is not he who constructs a machine

chine most capable of ordering its motions, and of giving laws for its due regulation? While the actions of man are directed by the laws of God, it is so long impossible that he should go blindly forward, or that his feet should not walk in the way of knowledge. He moves in one certain and limited sphere, where his way is plain before him; and his guide is continually at hand to direct him, that he turn not *to the right hand, or to the left.*

Can any thing be more desirable, in this valley of darkness and uncertainty, than to walk under the brightness of perpetual day?—than to have our paths illumined by that glorious Being, who *has arrayed himself with light as with a garment?*

This is nothing more than what a good man continually enjoys. While he makes the revealed will of God the rule of his actions, he walks for ever in the light of his countenance; and he that made him ordered his goings.

But as the path of the just may be said to be a shining light with respect to its certainty and clearness, so likewise it may be termed in consideration of that pleasure and chearfulness which it affords to those wise children, who have the happiness to walk therein. Their ways are, indeed, ways of pleasantness. They are equally strangers to the anxieties of doubt, and the apprehensions of fear. They neither regret the prospect that is behind them, nor tremble at that which lies before. Easy and serene, they proceed

ceed to the boundaries of life, and approach them with unshaken repose.

“ Behold, say they, here is the end of
“ all our toils, the limits of our earthly
“ existence. We have *finished the course*
“ of life, and *henceforth there is laid up*
“ for us a reward that fadeth not away.
“ As we have hitherto walked in the
“ light of the everlasting God, so we
“ shall henceforward enjoy his glorious
“ presence. Not strangers to the com-
“ forts of doing his will on earth, lo!
“ now, we shall have the honour and the
“ happiness of fulfilling it in heaven—
“ we go to that *innumerable company of*
“ *Angels*, that exalted society of spiritual
“ Beings, who have either, like us, dis-
“ charged the offices of a mortal life, or
“ have been created from eternity, the
“ attendants of their immortal Maker.”

With

With these sublime and animating reflections the just man closes his life ; but before a state of mind like this can be attained, he must have long toiled in the paths of duty ; the habits of virtue must have been confirmed by time, the expectations of immortality ensured by the firmest faith ; and hope must have been long in possession of the mind, before it can leave behind it a moral certainty of that happiness it had in view. For

II. *Though the path of the just is always as a shining light, yet its brightness is progressive, and it shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

To whatever the depravity of the human mind may have been owing originally, nothing is more certain than that it is strangely depraved. Even virtue herself,

herself, all amiable as she is, must be long a solicitor, before she obtains any established interest in the heart. Even that degree of moral perfection which is attainable in this life must be an acquisition of time, and cannot be attained without long assiduity. The dispositions of the mind, naturally tending to vice, are not to be subdued instantaneously, nor are such conversions, since the cessation of miracles, either to be hoped for or believed.

Fanatics, indeed, will pretend to refer you to the day, or to the very hour, when THE GREAT WORK WAS WROUGHT IN THEM, but this is to be numbered amongst the many vain delusions of a people whose religion is directed by imagination.

The

The change from vice to virtue must be gradually brought about. Reason is slow in its operations, and unless the conversion be the work of reason, it stands upon an uncertain foundation, and will probably endure but a short time. The passions, indeed, are more active in their execution; but as they are in themselves changeable, so will be all their effects.

How slowly reason prevails upon the heart to conquer any favorite inclination is well known to every man who has made the attempt. But though it is difficult, it is far from being impossible; the most arduous parts of religious duty are to be overcome by the concurring assistance of heaven, and he whose heart is impress'd with the deepest characters of vice may in time be reclaimed by the
affiduities

SERMON III.

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affiduities of reason, assisted and supported by the divine influence.

Can I here forbear to observe how strong an admonition this difficulty of conversion affords against sinking deep in the habits of sin? Who would render still more laborious a task which must once be performed? Who would add weight to a burthen which he apprehends to be already too heavy, and which, nevertheless, he must bear, or perish?

However, after these disagreeable truths, it may afford us some consolation, that when once we have set our feet in the shining path of the just, virtue will become more easy to us, as it becomes more habitual; that we shall receive new light, and fresh encouragement the further we proceed, and that the way of the

the righteous shineth more and more unto
the perfect day.

If vice can have charms sufficient to
establish herself more securely by habit
and custom; if guilt, whose allurements
are specious and deceitful, can, in time,
reconcile the heart to all its horrible de-
formities, much more surely shall good-
ness, shall virtue prevail by habit. These
are like faithful friends—the further
trial we have of them, we shall find cause
to love, and value them the more.

That the pleasure of religious duty in-
creases in proportion to the practice of
it, we need only appeal to the testimony
of good men in all ages. The kingdom
of God is, in this respect, to every indi-
vidual, as a grain of mustard seed, small
and inconsiderable in its first principles,
but,

S E R M O N III. 47

but, by time and proper cultivation, growing up and flourishing into a magnificent body.

It is thus too that a righteous person may be considered metaphorically as a *tree planted by the rivers of water, which not only bringeth forth its fruit in due season*, but from the nature of its nutritious situation, acquires a stronger and more ample growth.

The life of a good man affords a prospect not unlike that of a mountainous country—Upon the first view it appears barren and solitary, but, as we proceed, the scene changes; and we are presented with views of fertility and beauty; which grow still more delightful, the farther we advance.

The

The righteous not only *run with patience the race that is set before them*, but acquire new strength and activity, as they approach towards the end. Animated by the divine promises, they stretch forward to obtain *the high prize of their calling*, the final objects of that unshaken faith, whose victorious influence *overcometh the world*.—Thus it is that the light of the just *shineth more and more unto the perfect day*.

III. But *the way of the wicked is as darkness*.

So says the Proverbialist; yet how should that be? Are not the powers of reason and intelligence equally enjoyed by the wicked as by the righteous, and doth not God *make his sun to shine both on the just and on the unjust*? How then should

the way of the wicked be as darkness? And yet it must be so too, since the wise Prince, who pronounced it to be such, could not affirm it without conviction.

A state of wickedness is always denominated, by the sacred writers, a state of darkness. That terrible image seemed to be most expressive of the unhappy condition of those, who walked in the *blindness of their mind, alienated from the life of God.* Death is another image by which their state is described. Thus the wicked are said to be *dead in trespasses and sins*; and the Apostle gives them a solemn summons, as it were from the grave. *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.* But what is still more express to the present purpose is the language of Christ himself. *When thine*

eye is evil, says he, *thy body also is full of darkness. — Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.* This is as St. Luke relates the passage: St. Matthew has it more emphatically. *If the light which is in thee be darkness, how great is THAT darkness.*

The propriety of these scripture images will appear more clearly if we consider the tendency which vice has to darken the understanding. It is necessary that the power of reason should be in a great degree suspended before a man can implicitly give himself up to the dominion of wickedness: For though the heart has a natural propensity to vice, it is guarded by a moral sense of right and wrong, and this sense must necessarily be extinguished or suspended before any man can become indiscriminately wicked.

It is the suspension of this sense, and the perversion of the understanding which constitutes the moral darkness that is mentioned in the text.

When the heart is devoted to wickedness, and involved in guilt, the understanding is generally perverted by the passions. A man may rest contented without the approbation of others, but he cannot be satisfied without his own; he therefore seeks for arguments, however fallacious, to persuade himself that he is in the right, and makes his understanding the dupe of his heart.

But, compared to the shining path of the righteous, the way of the wicked is as darkness in many other respects. For what are his prospects either present or future? What but a melancholy passage

through this region of sorrow, terminating, at best, in an insensible grave? Where are the hopes that should comfort him under the anguish of affliction? Where is the faith that should support him in the moments of anxiety? Where is the conscience that might encourage him in the hour of reflection? Alas! his hope ends with that life, of whose miseries he complains; and, to use the language of the Apostle, instead of *holding faith and a good conscience, concerning faith he has made shipwreck.*

IV. In this miserable and hopeless situation—this more than Egyptian darkness, no wonder if the wicked *know not at what they stumble.* While the mind is in a state of perplexing uncertainty, without any determinate principle of faith, or any rule of action, dissatisfaction and confusion must be unavoidable.

It is impossible for any man, however wicked, wholly to divest himself of the apprehensions of futurity—These *will* attack him at certain times, unhinge his resolutions, and destroy his confidence—Nay, though he holds himself the avowed enemy of superstition, he will often be more superstitious than those whose faith is the subject of his ridicule—he will often be haunted with groundless fears, and become the slave of childish timidity.

This is agreeable to the character that is given of him in another part of the book of Proverbs, viz. that *he fleeth when no one pursues*; which has the same sense as the expression in the text, *they stumble as they know not what*.

Such and so different are the characters and conditions of the wicked and the

righteous. The life of the one, directed by the divine wisdom and goodness, is serene, and chearful, and comfortable as the light: That of the other, guided by no principle of reason, no laws of that Being who gave it, is gloomy, and perplexing, and uncomfortable as darkness.

The righteous supported by faith and hope, finds his happiness increase with his piety, and sees the journey of life grow brighter, and more inviting towards its end: While the wicked, destitute of every hope that might reconcile him to futurity, wanders miserably forward in darkness and uncertainty; perplexed both with fears that are, and with apprehensions that are not vain.

Behold here, my friends, two different lots! Chuse which shall be your own.

Halt

S E R M O N I I I .

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Halt not between two opinions, *If the Lord be God, worship him; but if Baal, then worship him.* If the ways of wickedness delight you, pursue them—but remember they lead through darkness to death—If the path of the just be your choice, enter into it, and may God prosper you on your way.

The righteous supported by faith and hope, finds his happiness in the journey of life his piety, and sees the journey of life grow brighter, and more inviting towards its end; While the wicked, destitute of every hope that might reconcile him to truth, wanders miserably forward in darkness and uncertainty; perplexed both with fears that are, and with apprehensions that are not vain.

E 4

Behold here, my friends, two different lots! Chose which shall be your own.

2 E M O I W
SERMON IV.

The different Conditions of
the Wicked and the Righte-
ous considered in several
Views.

PSALM cxviii. 15.

*The Voice of Joy and Health is in the
Dwelling of the Righteous.*

WERE the principles of religion
recommended to us only by the
influence they must have on the happi-
ness of human life, no wise man would
hastily despise them.

For,

For, if human laws have their foundation, their security in those principles; if the order and the harmony of society are preserved by them; if they enforce the virtues of temperance and good will, and produce both health of body and peace of mind—such effects are surely most interesting.

But, in the first place, we should make it our enquiry whether religion is really capable of producing such effects, or whether she does not owe all her amiable attributes to the partial praises of her own professors.

This enquiry we shall be able to prosecute most effectually by comparing the opposite characters of the wicked and the righteous, by considering the lives of those who make religion their guide,
and

and of those who are actuated by different principles.

While we pursue the argument, it may be worth our while to take in the observations which the sacred writers have given us on this subject, not in order to borrow any evidence from their assertions, but, if possible, to illustrate and confirm their observations, by an appeal to experience, and by the testimony of facts.

“The wicked fleeth, when no one pursues; but the righteous is as bold as a lion.”

Guilt and fear are inseparable. He, who is conscious of a crime, if he is not dead to all sensibility, must be apprehensive either of punishment or disgrace,

or,

S E R M O N IV.

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or, should he triumph undetected in the secrecy of his villainy, he cannot fly the accusations of his own heart—Conscience will solicit him with the most unwelcome impertinence—with honest obstinacy, will hold up the mirror to his conduct, alarm him with the future, and reproach him with the past. This is not an imaginary picture: It is borrowed from the universal experience, and acknowledgement of mankind. All agree that fear is the companion of vice; and the testimony of those who have happily returned to virtue is, in this case, indisputable.

On the other hand, he who acts upon the principles of religion, lives and thinks at ease. He has nothing to apprehend either from punishment, or disgrace,

grace, from an injured neighbour, or an offended God. His boldness is not the triumph of daring guilt, not an affected confidence arising from the overthrow of truth and reflection, which can last only during the hour of riot, or the indolence of stupefaction—it is a steady and a lasting principle, supported by the testimonies of a conscience and of reason. A good man is, therefore, in no circumstances subject to any other fear than that reverence for his God which soothes him, while it awes—that delightful fear, which, founded in love and gratitude, knows no other anxiety, than what accompanies the agreeable desire to please.

“ I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like the green bay; but he passed away, and, lo! he was not; I sought him, but
“ he

S E R M O N IV. 61

“ he could not be found. * * * Yet
 “ have I never seen the righteous for-
 “ saken, nor his seed begging their
 “ bread.”

Such were the observations of the
 Psalmist, with respect to the temporal
 conditions of the wicked and the righte-
 ous.—But here it may, possibly, be ob-
 jected that, under the mosaical dispen-
 sation, temporal rewards and punish-
 ments were the principal sanctions of re-
 ligion; and that these were necessarily
 more manifest, in proportion as the
 prospects of futurity were less certain—
 that the Jews, in general, looked upon
 the misfortunes and afflictions of the
 wicked to be the immediate effect of the
 divine judgments; and that it was, there-
 fore, no wonder, if the writer of the
 Psalms let fall an observation which was
 the

the obvious consequence of a principle of faith. To these objections I will allow their full force without exception, or reply—I desire nothing more than an appeal to the experience of mankind, and to common observation, whether success is not naturally annexed to virtue, and whether misery and misfortune are not the moral consequences of vice, altogether exclusive of divine sanctions and interpositions.

Have not many of those, who by dishonest means have raised themselves to the eminence of power, fallen a sacrifice, either to private treachery, or to public resentment? Can he, who owes his dignity to villainous combinations, secure any interest with the faithful, or with the honest? And—if not, is he not always liable to be subverted by the same wretches

S E R M O N IV. 63

wretches who contributed to raise him? Will *they* hazard themselves in the defence of a man, whom either the views of private interest, or a natural proneness to villainy alone excited them to raise? Nay, will they not even rejoice in the ruin of such a man, not from the love of virtue, of their country, but from an innate principle of malignity? —The history of the world furnishes us with numberless instances of this kind.

On the contrary a good man has the patronage of mankind for his support; and it has seldom been known, even amongst unenlightened nations, that he has not died in peace. It has rarely happened that he, who was eminently distinguished by his virtues, has been long distressed either by envy or oppression.

Some

Some instances, no doubt, there are, not only where the righteous have suffered promiscuously with the wicked, but where the power of the latter has oppressed the former even to death. These are the inevitable consequences of moral evil, without the admission of which, freedom of will, and even the possibility of virtue, would be totally destroyed. But these afford no general proof that goodness has not a moral tendency to the security and the prosperity of greatness. So far from it, indeed, that the almost universal surprize and indignation which the oppression of virtue in any station occasions, is a testimony that such an event is not only very detestable, but very rare.

If the lot of the righteous is fallen in the lower sphere of life, there is yet
little

SERMON IV. 65

little probability that he should either be destitute himself, or that his children should beg their bread. His attention to his duty will make him temperate and industrious, and temperance and industry are the parents of health and plenty.

“The joy of the righteous continueth, but the hope of the wicked shall be destroyed.”

In this changeable and uncertain state of life, where every scheme of happiness we can form is always liable to be broken; where chance or error may destroy the laboured effects of prudence and industry; where the faculties of sense and health are exposed to ruin from the slightest accident; certainly the only reasonable and satisfactory means of

happinefs must be those that are founded on the hopes of piety.

A few hours, or a few days of pain would be tolerable, were we supported by the expectation of a certain relief. Such always is the condition of the righteous: Whether he suffers the common, or the extraordinary evils of life, they are alleviated by the prospect of a certain, and a happy change; a change which shall exempt him from misery for ever; and, from those pains and sorrows, which await the condition of mortality, shall remove him to the regions of everlasting rest—to dwellings where the voice of joy is heard perpetually—where the benevolent Father of nature has prepared eternal happinefs for the righteous, and where he, who suffered the afflictions of mortal evil, shall, with

that affection peculiar to his character, *wipe off all tears from all eyes, and bid sorrow and mourning flee away.*

Deprived of these hopes, the great support of the righteous, *where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* For it is asserted (and we shall find the assertion is not vain) that *his hope shall be destroyed.*

Those anxieties and distresses, which either befall him in the common course of things, or have been immediately brought upon him by his own follies and vices, will bear upon him with all their force.—That great relief of human misery, the prospect of future happiness, he is entirely deprived of. As his only agreeable expectations are confined to this life, he can have nothing to set against its common evils; and they must necessarily wound him in his tenderest attachments.

But when extraordinary calamities attack him; when he finds himself involved in hopeless misfortunes—what can he do but give himself up to unavailing complaint, and mourn over the prospect of irremediable misery?

“Lo! this is the man that took not God for his trust; but trusted in the multitude of his riches, and strengthened himself in his ungodliness.”

The evangelical Prophet compares the wicked to “the troubled sea, which cannot rest; whose waters cast forth mire and dirt.”——But “the fruits of righteousness,” we are told by the Apostle, “are peace and joy in believing.”

The aptness and propriety of the Prophet's comparison are extremely obvious.

S E R M O N IV. 69

If we attend to the character and conduct of the wicked, we shall find them inconsistent, uneasy, and tumultuous. The hopes that are founded merely on the things of this world most frequently terminate in disappointment: the pursuits of vice are attended with pain and disgust: irregular appetites destroy the health of the body; and ungoverned passions banish peace from the mind. How dreadful then must be the condition of that wretch, whose hopes are fruitless, whose pursuits are painful, whose health is destroyed, and whose peace is banished!

He, whose conduct cannot claim the testimony of reason, if he looks back upon his past life, must turn from it, dissatisfied with a barren, or disgusted with a reproachful scene. If he looks

forward to the future, he is presented with a prospect still more disagreeable; a prospect which can never be looked upon with indifference, by him who has secured no interest in the allotments of eternity.

These reflections are sufficient to embitter even the moments of pleasure; but they will make their approach at a time when there is nothing to oppose or overbear them—in the hour of solitude and silence! Shall the wicked *then find rest*? Shall he stifle the dictates of conscience, when every passion is languid and uninflamed? Or shall he triumph over reason by an affected insensibility? Alas! in vain! In vain would he attempt to prove that remorse and misery are not the portion of guilt.

But

But the fruits of righteousness, we are told by the Apostle, are peace and joy in believing.

How opposite! How unlike is the life of the righteous to that of the wicked! A consistency of sentiment, and an evenness of mind, discover themselves in all the actions of a good man, and peace and tranquillity attend him in every scene of life. What pleasure can be equal to that which his reflections afford him, when a life of consistent virtue presents itself to his view! But when he looks forward to his future state, he then reaps that peace and joy in believing, which the Apostle declares to be the fruits of his righteousness.

He, who has a reasonable prospect of an interest with the Supreme Being, must

surely conceive the most exalted hopes. When he contemplates the glorious attributes of his Maker and Redeemer, his transcendent goodness, his unbounded power, he may justly form the highest expectations of that inheritance which shall be the portion of the just.

Hence the voice of joy is heard in his dwellings.

From what has been observed, it may be justly concluded how much superior the pleasures of religion are to all worldly enjoyments, since those can make even pain and calamity tolerable—how much preferable the life of a good man is, even in this world, to that of the wicked, since his piety has not only a final, but a present and natural tendency to make him happy.

May,

SERMON IV. 73

May, therefore, the Almighty give us grace and wisdom to avail ourselves of these conclusions!—may he inspire us with such a sense of his infinite goodness, and of his gracious concern for his creatures, that we may rejoice in his service both now and evermore!

Hence the voice of joy is heard in his

From what has been observed, it may be justly concluded how much superior the pleasures of religion are to all worldly enjoyments, since those can make even the most calamitous and miserable life of a good man as pleasant as that of the wicked, but his piety has not only a final, but a present and natural tendency to make

May

SERMON V.

The Folly, Guilt and Misery
of habitual Discontent.

L A M. iii. 39.

Wherefore should a living man complain?

DISCONTENT seems to have a natural inheritance in some minds, and, what should, seemingly, be inconsistent, they are never so much at ease, as when they complain. As if they were in love with the misery whereat they repine, they so industriously cherish the remembrance of it, that they re-
fuse

fuse even the relief which time and variety would infallibly bring with them. They are forever contemplating the gloomy side of life, and the appearance of joy or pleasure seems to be a kind of disappointment to them. Whatever wears the aspect of calamity, tho' remote from their own concerns, immediately catches their attention; and they faithfully echo the voice of sorrow, though it be heard from afar. They join in the complaints of misery, not from any generous or compassionate motives, but because such complaints are agreeable to their natural temper, and gratify their inclination to murmur with fresh subjects of distress.

Should

Should a person of this temper be, hold a family on the brink of ruin, he would not feel one emotion of pity for it's approaching misery, nor, were it in his power, would he contribute to prevent it: Such a prevention would be a disappointment to him, as it would deprive him of what he always embraces with eagerness, a recent occasion to complain——For he would rather see the world itself in perpetual misery, than have no room to murmur at the distresses of life.

Yet surely nothing can be more absurd than to indulge such a disposition; for the life of man has no misery so great as habitual discontent.

Pain

Pain and sickness are generally transient evils. They are either removed by the return of health, or relieved by intervals of ease, or, at the worst, are made supportable by hope: but a mind habituated to complain, that quarrels with every occurrence of life, and implicitly gives itself up to causeless petulance, or unreasonable disgust, is for ever miserable.

It is not, indeed, given to man to be intirely free from solicitude, nor to pass thro' life with invariable tranquillity—These are the privileges of superior beings, who, as they are above the reach of misfortune, are strangers to distress. It was never intended that we should be entirely free from care,
which

which is, in a moderate degree, necessary for the support of a life, doomed, from creation, to subsist by labour. But whatever exceeds a moderate care is productive of unhappy consequences. When the mind is totally taken up with secular attentions, and makes the things of this world the *principal* objects of its concern, from the uncertain nature and condition of those things, it must necessarily meet with many disappointments, be sometimes mortified, and frequently perplexed.—These evils gradually lead to habitual discontent: the temper grows gloomy, and the spirit is discomposed.

To persuade those who labour under this wretched turn of mind to consult
their

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their own ease and happiness, I would offer the following considerations.

I. To be uneasy under the several circumstances and events of human life must proceed from the want of a due confidence in God.

He who is firmly satisfied of the infinite care of PROVIDENCE, who acknowledges the justice of his dispensations, and relies on his regard for his creatures, however inconvenient his lot, in the present disposition of things, may appear, will never be dejected at human occurrences. He knows that the all-wise Author of the universe is best able to determine what is necessary, or convenient for him; and though his passage through

through life may appear painful or troublesome, he concludes that it may probably be safer than one that was smother and less perplexing.—If he is obliged to drink the bitter cup of adversity, he remembers, with a consciousness of his own safety, how many have been intoxicated with the cup of joy—And, in short, under every circumstance, he lays hold on this consolation, that whatever the eye of Providence suffers, it must be for the best.

He, then, who is dissatisfied with his portion in life, must be without a proper sense of the **ETERNAL PROVIDENCE**; and to be without that sense is a dreadful degree of folly indeed!

Another

SERMON V. 81

Another general cause of discontent proceeds from over-rating the good things of this life. More than half of mankind entertain mistaken opinions of those things which they have never possessed. They look upon the luxury of affluence, and the pomp of grandeur as replete with some wonderful degree of felicity which they have never enjoyed; but which, however, in the common estimate of things, they think themselves as well entitled to enjoy, as those that possess them. Dazzled and carried away by shining appearances, they never reflect that happiness is not a substance but an idea; and that it can no more consist in the advantages of wealth or splendor, than the soul can consist of the gross particles of the body. They

never consider how many achings and sorrows belong to power and affluence; nor observe that these are, in general, rather productive of misery than content. To them they appear to have a thousand charms; but they are charms which ignorance and novelty alone confer upon them—ignorance that is blind and novelty that lives but a day!

It is most commonly, indeed, in little and uninformed minds that a habit of repining at more affluent circumstances finds a place; and, if I might hazard a general observation on this subject, I would venture to affirm that there is no better argument of the greatness or the excellence of any human mind than the happiness it possesses. Not to be

shocked

shocked at the great misfortunes of life, nor to be affected when the near connections of the heart are broken, is not expected from man, because it is inconsistent with his passions and powers; but to repine at every little accident that thwarts our expectations, or suits not with our convenience, proves that the mind is fixed on little objects.

II. How unfortunate, nay, how impious, as well as foolish, is such a temper as this!

While it renders a man unfit for the pleasures of society, (which he neither enjoys himself, nor suffers others to enjoy through his impertinent complaints) it makes him equally disqualified for the duties of religion: for how should

he apply to that God for assistance or protection, whose providence his complaints either accuse or deny? what acceptable worship can he offer to a being whom he either believes to be unconcerned in the government of the world, or, if he admits his government, quarrels with his administration? nay, how, indeed, should he entertain any thoughts of his duty, when his secular concerns are too much for his mind?

If we form a right idea of our Creator and ourselves—If we consider our situation in life as the immediate direction of providence in the great order of things, we must surely reflect that to be dissatisfied with the determinations of the Supreme Wisdom and Justice, must

SERMON V. 85

be to reproach that wisdom, and to impeach that justice,

But, what! shall the creatures of an hour censure the wise regulations of everlasting knowledge? shall man, who owes his being to the Almighty's goodness, and the continuance of it to his care, quarrel with his sacred dispensations, and distrust his mercy? Shall a *living* man complain? Is not such a conduct, in the highest degree, impious and ungrateful? and is not the divine goodness more than sufficiently vindicated, when those, who thus abuse it, yet *live to complain*? Surely this is a most dangerous temper of mind—and those who can acknowledge it to be their own ought to tremble lest the divine displeasure should take from them that being which they

bear about with unthankfulness and discontent. *God, indeed, is slow to anger, and of great goodness; he knoweth whereof we are made; he remembereth that we are but dust—but then, shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?*

Nothing can be more convincing than the arguments which reason affords in support of the great duty of religious resignation; yet the selfish and the impious might still, possibly, find some evasion, some excuse for their presumptuous and ungrateful censures on providence, were not that duty indispensibly enjoined in the sacred writings.—But when we are, there, expressly commanded to *be thankful, to praise,*
for

for every instance of his bounty, our Father who is in heaven, to acknowledge his goodness in all his dispensations, and to bear those evils which are incident to this life with patience, shall we presume, by the contrary behaviour of cavilling and regret, to transgress or neglect the divine commands? Every holy motive calls upon us, every reasonable inducement invites us to be humbly grateful, and dutifully resigned. Whatever our situation, or our circumstances may be, let us remember that he who gave us this life has an everlasting right to our gratitude for that gift; and that no circumstances, whatever, of accidental calamity can acquit us of those obligations we have to be thankful to him.

But thankfulness and discontent can never dwell together. The sentiments of gratitude arise from chearfulness and resignation, and can find no place in a mind that is accustomed to complain. To be grateful for any gift, we must first be pleased with it; for few minds are capable of such abstracted virtue as to retain a lasting gratitude for a favour which they found troublesome or inconvenient.

It is impossible for any man who is discontented with himself to be contented with his God: it is impossible that, with any other than a mere mock-worship, he should offer his thanks to the supreme providence for *his creation, his preservation, and all the blessings of*

a life, which his gloomy disposition made him look upon as a curse.

* Such was the guilt which of old, attended those that *murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.* A guilt which, in this, as well as in all other cases, is accompanied with misery.]

III. If we regarded only the happiness of this life, we should find that the resignation which is expected from us as an act of piety, would prove the means of comfort—If there are a thousand possible accidents which no prudence can guard against, no sagacity foresee, shall we mourn what it was not in our power to obviate, and what human wisdom could not avoid? To be over solicitous about events which we cannot command—to be dissatisfied with occurrences which

which answer not the luxury of expectation, nor the predictions of sanguine hope—what is it but to involve ourselves in needless anxiety and avoidable distress?

A mind accustomed to complain, eternally apprehensive of new disappointments, and the various distresses which in the wide field of possibility may come to pass, can never be at ease. Every new day will bring nearer some prospect of misery, and every hour disgust with some disagreeable circumstance, or some trivial inconvenience; 'till the mind, by long murmuring, acquire an habitual gloominess, and life itself become one horrid scene either of real, or imaginary evils.

That this terrible condition may never be ours, let us avail ourselves of every argument that reason or religion suggest
against

SERMON V. 91

against it. Let us consider, what has been already observed, that to repine at the events of life proceeds from a mistaken idea of Providence, and the want of a due confidence in it's care—that only by over rating what are called the good things of this world, we look upon ourselves as hardly used in the distribution of them—that discontent must be no inferior degree of guilt, as it is not only a disparagement of the care of Providence, but repugnant to his express commands—and, lastly, that habitual murmuring is not the way to alleviate, but to aggravate affliction.

If these considerations had their due weight, surely little more would be necessary to persuade gloomy sorrow to seek it's happiness in resignation.

To

To add to the force of these arguments, let it be considered by the *careful about many things*, that, if future good is the object of their solicitude, *to fear God, and to keep his commandments* is the way to obtain it without disappointment, perfect and eternal.—That, if present afflictions are the cause of their complaint, to endure them with patience, as it is the duty of a Christian, so it is the only means of making them more supportable.

God for ever grant that under no circumstances we may depart from our duty, that we may bear every event of life as becometh dependent creatures, and *so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal.*

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SERMON VI.

Paraphrase and Reflections on the Story of Joseph.

GEN. xlv. 4.

*I am Joseph your Brother, whom ye sold
into Egypt.*

THERE is no story in the sacred
writings in which the heart has
so much to do as that of Joseph. Pride,
envy, surprize, affection, fear, hope,
and joy have their several turns, and,
as we read, strike upon the attention,
or excite the passions.

Joseph

Joseph was one of the younger children of Jacob, and indulged with those particular forbearances and endearments, which are always due to the tenderest years.—These little distinctions of his father's love were, however, the source of many miseries to him; and they leave an useful lesson to all parents, to beware lest they sow the seeds of jealousy in the hearts of brothers.

Envious of Joseph's superior favour and privileges, his brethren had long looked upon him with disgust, till, at last, an unfortunate circumstance turned their jealousy into rancour. The innocent and unwary youth inadvertently told them that, in a dream he beheld their sheaves *making obeisance* to his, “What! my officious favourite, surely
“ this

“this is too much : Your smooth tales,
 “and your prattling caresses have
 “caught the heart and the ear of your
 “unthinking father—but to grow vain
 “upon your distinction, young man!—
 “to add insult to treachery!—not con-
 “tented with robbing your brethren of
 “a father’s favour, would you also de-
 “prive them of their liberty? And do
 “you expect that those who are your
 “superiors by birth and age, should
 “bow like slaves to you?”

How specious are such reproaches as
 these, and what an air of equity and
 reason do they assume! It is the pecu-
 liar misfortune of innocence, that it
 makes us too inattentive to the conse-
 quences of our common actions: And
 while we never suspect that the world
 has

has any other designs or sentiments than such as pass in our own breasts, we find that the most trivial circumstances of our conduct, many times, become a snare to us. Unhappy Joseph! Poor unexperienced boy! Little didst thou think that the innocent recital of thy dream should draw upon thee so much obloquy, so much envy! Behold! Unapprehensive of the rage that was already kindled against him, he unwarily lets fall another circumstance which blows it up to the utmost fury. I dreamed, says he, (with the same undefigning innocence) Behold! I have had one dream more; and *the sun, the moon, and eleven stars, did reverence to me.*

Envy, when inflamed to the utmost, vents not itself in idle reproaches, but
plots,

plots, in horrid silence, the ruin of it's object.

The unnatural brethren now no longer threatened or reviled; but at once determined to sacrifice a life so obnoxious to their pride. The scene of this shocking resolution was the field of Dothan, where they were keeping sheep, a scene of pastoral simplicity, but not of pastoral innocence. There Joseph came to seek his brethren. Tell me, said the affectionate youth to a stranger in the way, hast thou seen my brethren? Behold I am wandering in these lonely fields to seek them; tell me, I pray thee, where they keep their sheep. They have left the fields of Schechem, replied the stranger, and are gone to Dothan; there wilt thou find them.

Probably this was some more retired place, some darker and remoter desert, in which they chose to execute their horrid purpose.

“He comes, they cried, he comes.
 “Behold the dreamer! Now vain boy!
 “Thou shalt now suffer for thy pride,
 “thy insolence, and those coaxing arts
 “thou hast made use of to seduce the
 “ear of thy father; that ear is now too
 “far off to hear thy complaints, neither
 “shall they abuse it any more. Come,
 “let us slay him, and throw him into a
 “pit: we shall say some wild beast hath
 “devoured him.”

Thus had the unhappy youth fallen a sacrifice to the envy and the jealousy of his cruel brethren, but Reuben, the generous, the amiable Reuben interposed.

“Hold,

" Hold, rash men! unnatural and
 " unfeeling brothers! Let us not in one
 " thoughtless moment throw away the
 " peace and innocence of our whole
 " lives. Good God! how am I asto-
 " nished at the horror of your resolution!
 " for the sake of heaven, before your
 " hands are imbrued in the blood of
 " innocence, a brother's blood! I in-
 " treat you, consider—what is the life
 " you are about to take away? A life
 " derived from the same fountain with
 " your own, fed from the same breast,
 " and cherished by the same affection!
 " But this is not all: You will plunge
 " your impious daggers in the Author
 " of your being; you will kill your
 " venerable father; his children will
 " kill their father. No matter how
 " you may relate the horrid tale; no

“ matter, if his child be slain, whether
“ by savage beasts, or by savage bro-
“ thers; for he will weep, poor man!
“ He will tear his grey hairs, and
“ beat his hoary bosom. And are you
“ yet determined? will you pierce your
“ father’s heart through the heart of
“ his child? will you, indeed, fill his
“ aged eyes with tears? and bring
“ down his grey hairs with sorrow to
“ the grave?—But, if you are deter-
“ mined, let us not, at least, stain our
“ hands with his blood. Let us rather
“ *cast him into this pit that is in the wil-
“ derness, and leave him.*” *This he*
said, continues the sacred writer, that he
might deliver him out of their hands, and
restore him to his father. But here the
generous Reuben was disappointed. He
appears

appears to have left his brethren on some occasion or other, and they took the opportunity to sell Joseph to some travelling merchants. For afterwards, when Reuben returned unto the pit, behold he was not in the pit, and he rent his clothes; and returned to his brethren; and said, The child is not yonder, and I, whither shall I go! Poor youth! what anguish must his tender heart have felt, when he found his brother taken away, and was ignorant of his fate! No doubt he gave way to all the violence of affectionate grief; for he rent his clothes, crying, "the child is not yonder; and
" I, whither shall I go? my dear, poor
" murdered brother! where shall I go
" to weep over thy lifeless body, to
" embrace thy cold limbs, and close thy
" eyes!" How affecting is this brother-

ly sorrow ! But behold a more distress-
ful scene ! The venerable Patriarch ! an
aged and affectionate father mourning
for the untimely death of a beloved
child ! how pitiable is such sorrow as
this ! our hearts bleed within us while
we think of it. “ Yes (complains the
father to his ungracious children) “ I
“ perceive too well the cause of my
“ child’s death. Some evil beast hath
“ devoured him. Yes, my child, this
“ was thy little coat of divers colours
“ which thy mother’s fondness provided
“ —Ah ! little did she think that it
“ should be torn by the bloody teeth of
“ a savage ! This coat thy sorrowful
“ brothers found in the desert, all rent
“ and mangled, and bloody as it is.
“ Joseph is no more. I will go down
“ into the grave, to my son in mourning.
“ There,

S E R M O N VI. 103

*“ There, only, my heart can forget it’s
“ sorrows, and my aged eyes shall weep
“ no longer.”*

Let us now change our pity for a
moment into indignation.

It is observable that vice destroys all
traces of humanity in the heart.

These inhuman brethren were not in
the least concerned for the misery of
their father, provided that their story,
however shocking to *him*, might effec-
tually cover their own wicked actions.

But the historian tells us they rose up to
comfort him. O shameless insult ! in-
sufferable mockery ! Ye abandoned hy-
pocrites ! How durst you behold the sa-
cred sorrows of your venerable father ?

Ye! did ye offer your vile, dissembled condolence! did ye force the unnatural tear, and put on the appearance of pity! Heaven and earth! can man be so *deliberately* base?

But enough of this disagreeable part of the story! Let us hasten forward to a more pleasing scene; and behold the lamented Joseph, after the space of about twenty years, in possession of the highest honours of the most opulent kingdom in the world.

Inspired by the spirit of immortal wisdom, from the condition of a slave, he became the first minister of one of the first princes upon earth. The keys of power were entrusted to him, and the gardens of Egypt yielded their
treasure

treasure into his hand. He whose Providence directs the events of nature, who lifteth the poor from his obscurity, that he may set him with princes, displayed in this instance, in a most extraordinary manner, his gracious purposes in behalf of suffering innocence. Suffer me to pass over some disagreeable circumstances that happened to Joseph, when in Egypt, the trial of his virtue, and his unjust imprisonment; perhaps the Almighty Providence might *suffer* these accidents as the means of his future promotion.

However that might be, it is certain that his God *took him from prison and from judgment, that he made him see his seed, and prolong his days, and that the divine Pleasure prospered in his hand.*

But

But behold! The same over-ruling Power, wholed him safe to glory through so many perils, is now determined that he shall again see his brethren.

Before I proceed further upon this event, I beg leave to give you some caution against a common error concerning the ways of God to man. It is very natural to conclude that the Almighty previously appointed all these circumstances in order to bring about the event; that Joseph's brethren were fatally inspired with rancour against him, that they might sell him into Egypt; and that a general famine was the necessary and fore-appointed means of their seeing him there. On which I shall observe, in one word; that "God cannot be the author of evil," but that to bring good out

of

S E R M O N VI. 107

of evil, is consistent both with his gracious disposition, and with his moral government of the world.

I will now lead you, without further delay, to a very affecting scene, to the meeting of Joseph and his brethren.

At first, says the sacred writer, though he knew them, yet he spake roughly to them; and said, "Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come."

It appears to me, that, as Benjamin was not with his brethren, Joseph suspected that the youngest had shared the fate intended for himself; and that, through envy, they had slain their brother. Else why, before he would discover himself to them, should he so much insist upon seeing Benjamin? He does absolutely
insist

insist upon seeing him, and retains Simeon as a pledge for his appearance.

But ah! How shall they prevail upon their aged father to part with Benjamin? his youngest, his beloved Benjamin! “What!” cried the venerable man, “would ye rob me of this child too?” “Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me.”

The generous Reuben again interposed, “Slay my two sons if I bring him not unto thee; deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again.” — “My son shall not go down,” replied the impatient father; “his brother is dead, and if death too should befall him in the way, ye shall
“bring

S E R M O N VI. 109

“bring down my grey hairs with sorrow
“ to the grave.”

Necessity, however, stronger than all human affections, prevailed where other arguments were ineffectual. The brethren are again sent to buy food, and the fond father gives up his darling child, the last hope and comfort of his age.

But what language shall paint the inexpressible affection of Joseph, upon the sight of Benjamin? When he saw him, his heart swelled within him, the tears of fondness sprung into his eyes, and he retired to indulge them.

Do not you hear this affectionate brother thus giving a loose to the fulness of his heart? “Great God of Jacob!

“ what

110 S E R M O N VI.

“ what a scene hast thou brought be-
 “ fore me! my eyes have again beheld
 “ my brethren, strangers to me more
 “ than twenty years!—Dear, unhappy
 “ men! indeed my heart forgives you—
 “ How do I long to discover myself to
 “ you, but that you would die with
 “ shame at the sight of your injured
 “ brother. None of you could rejoice
 “ at such a discovery, save Benjamin—
 “ he, amiable innocence! he entered
 “ not into your horrid conspiracy. But
 “ I must think of some means to free
 “ you from the disagreeable impressions
 “ of shame, when I make myself known
 “ to you; and endeavour to heighten
 “ your joy on that occasion, by first
 “ alarming your fears.”

S E R M O N VI. 111

Such probably was the generous design of Joseph in his scheme for retaining Benjamin—Such certainly was the effect that it had, when under the terrible apprehension of returning to their incensed father, with an account that they had left his youngest child a bond-slave, they were struck with this important, this astonishing discovery—"I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt."

I shall not dwell upon this scene. It is too great for description—But the heart of every brother and every father may conceive it.

Most of the instructive reflections that arise from this affecting story, I have interwoven with the thread of it. But
you

you will accept of one general observation from the whole.

Whatever distressful circumstances may befall you, always remember that you are under the eye of a benevolent and almighty Providence, who is able to bring good out of evil, and who is continually concerned for the happiness of his creatures. From this conviction, you will endeavour to engage his particular regard by the exercise of that virtue he is most in love with.

Be kindly affectioned one to another.

Very interesting Enquiry indeed! **A** But here it seems to be offered on-ly as the hint of abandoned profligacy, which had previously laid into the Al-terity. *Vol. I*

S E R M O N VII.

I. The Reasonableness of religious Duty.

II. The Utility of Prayer.

JOB xxi. 15.

What is the Almighty that we should serve him? Or what Profit shall we have if we pray unto him?

A Very interesting Enquiry indeed! But here it seems to be offered only as the insult of abandoned profligacy, which had previously said unto the Almighty, *depart from me, for I desire not*

the knowl.dge of thy ways.—Many such enquirers there are, who put the question, not from a desire of information, but from a spirit of insolence; and answer themselves according to their folly.

It is not in answer to such as these, then, that I mean to discuss the questions before us; nor shall I, on this occasion, fight against the prejudice of infidelity, which, in my opinion, stands more in need of prayers than of preaching—*Infidelity* and her friends have generally connections too strong to be overborne by truth, and too interesting to be broken by any power, but that whose existence they affect to disbelieve. Yet, is it possible? You will say—can the connections of *Infidelity* be interesting? For, what is she

S E R M O N VII. 115

the that men should serve her? And what profit shall they have if they pray unto her? Is length of days in her right hand? Are riches and honours in her left? Are her ways unexceptionably ways of pleasantness? And are ALL her paths peace? Those circumstances, perhaps, may not be quite so clear, yet *infidelity* must be allowed to have her advantages: For, is it not hers to soothe the alarming terrors of conscience?—to encourage vice with the hopes of impunity?—and to promise that, at last it shall perish in non-existence? Is the Christian steady in his principles? And is not the infidel obstinately steady? Have the disciples of Jesus embraced their religion even in tortures and in death? And has not *infidelity* likewise had her martyrs, voluntary

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martyrs?! It may perhaps be suggested that her friends dispatch themselves, because they cannot bear the horrid delays of a natural death, and are apt to shrink from their fortitude, if they make a gradual approach to the grave.—It may be so suggested, I say—and, possibly, the suggestion may be true; but, for the present, let us drop the subject.

To enquire by what obligations we are bound to serve the Almighty, and to set forth those advantages which may be derived from prayer, I am naturally led by the order of the questions before us—*What is the Almighty that we should serve him? Or what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?*

SERMON VII. 117

I. With respect to that part of the question—what is the Supreme Being? We must indeed acknowledge, that *touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out.* The mode of existence peculiar to a being that is infinite in all his capacities, finite creatures can neither know nor conceive. From what he has been pleased to communicate of himself, we may conclude that he is an all-powerful, all-intelligent Being, necessarily existing from all eternity—that he is, as it were, the diffusive soul of nature, who formed the world, and actuates what he has formed;—that he is, therefore, every where present, and the universal source and support of life.

But the question here is, more immediately, what is the relation which man,

in particular, bears to the Almighty *that he should serve him?* What obligations has he to do him service? Or what hopes are annexed to his services?

The divine obligations which man lies under are, first and principally, those of a creature to its creator. These obligations commence with his existence, and no time, or services can acquit him of them. As long as he continues to enjoy that instance of the divine bounty, the use of a living and a thinking being, so long necessarily must he be bound by duty to the giver of so good a gift—Nor, when the motives that must have induced the creator of the universe to call him into existence, are considered, will these obligations appear to have less weight:

SERMON VII. 119

weight: For, what could those motives be but the original principles of infinite goodness, willing to communicate the happiness of conscious life?—to give that pleasure which arises from the power of motion and sensibility, and which we may suppose to exist in the highest degree in his own perfect nature, in a proportionable measure to beings less perfect? Hence, through the whole scale of animal life, we observe that every creature is supplied with faculties capable of conveying to it all the happiness of which its nature can partake.

Thus those creatures, that have not the power of reflection, are not struck with the magnificence of the universe, nor with the symmetry and order of its

several parts; yet many of them have organs so peculiarly adapted to animal sensation, that it affords them the most exquisite delight; and if we look thro' the entire system of created beings, we shall find that each has some distinguished advantage which may, in their station, be equivalent to those higher privileges which different and superior natures seem to enjoy. The stag which is not endowed with the strength or sagacity of the elephant, excels him proportionably in swiftness, in which he finds both pleasure and security—The nightingale which cannot boast the strength of wing, or rapidity of the eagle—which cannot, like him, exult in cutting the midway-sky, or darting from region to region without the fear of a foe, yet finds that security

security which he places in his strength, in the impenetrable thicket, and enjoys the pleasures of her soothing long when he is oppressed with sleep.

In short, to whatever part of nature we carry our observations, we must still conclude that from motives of benevolence alone, and the desire of communicating happiness, the Almighty Creator was induced to establish that variety of animal life, with which the several elements are so abundantly supplied.

But in man, surely, in man his goodness shines with most distinguished lustre. Whether we consider the faculties of the mind, or the organs of the body; whether we reflect on the exquisite powers of

the

the senses, or on the objects provided for the gratification of those powers; whether we attend to the delights of memory, the amusements of fancy, or the directive power of reason;—must we not acknowledge the visible effects of the divine bounty? But in the whole course of life, as well as in the gift of that life, and of the faculties peculiar to it, do we not experience the continual care and attention of the same benevolent providence? He must, indeed, be a very unskilful observer who does not perceive that the visible creation is the work of a very wise and gracious being; but he who does not acknowledge the care of providence in the particular circumstances, of his own life, must have been negligent rather from ingratitude than from ignorance.

Such,

Such, then, are the obligations by which man is perpetually bound to serve his Creator. As he owes his life to the Almighty goodness, and the preservation of it to his providential care, the service of that life becomes invariably due to him, and the religious duty of man is originally founded in gratitude.

Upon this principle alone our obedience would be due to every law that the supreme Being should appoint us— But when we reflect that by the same benevolent motives, from which he brought us into life, he was actuated likewise, in giving us rules for the conduct of that life, a new obligation will be found to arise from thence, which must render our neglect of that obedience, which is expected from us, still

still more criminal: For, if we refuse to obey those precepts which were evidently intended by the divine wisdom to ensure our happiness, we offend at the same time against God and against ourselves—we are not only ungrateful for the past favours of Providence, but perversely refuse the present, while we reject those blessings that are inseparably annexed to the discharge of our religious duty.

By those blessings I do not mean those divine promises which respect futurity, but that happiness which is the immediate result of a religious conduct; and which a due obedience to the divine laws infallibly produces.

However,

However, if it should yet be asked, *what is the Almighty that we should serve him?* Another, and surely not the least powerful reason may be found in the hopes of futurity.

Those immortal promises of an existence invariably happy, and endless in its duration, which await the due performance of the duties enjoined us, have a claim to more difficult, and more laborious services, than any that the divine laws have appointed us. Nay, so transcendently great are the hopes which are founded on Christianity, that the services of the Son of God himself alone were able to procure them for us. After these considerations can it any more be asked, *what is the Almighty that we should serve him?*

him? Or will any one, after thus reflecting on the goodness and the promises of God, ask *what profit we shall have if we pray unto him?*

II. Should this yet remain a question, I would answer in the words of him in whose name we pray:

“ If a son should ask bread of any of you that is a father, would he give him a stone; or, would he for an egg, give him a serpent? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall our heavenly Father to them that ask him?”

That blessed Saviour has given us the strongest assurances, that whatever we

ask

SERMON VII. 127

ask in his name it shall be granted, that our prayers shall always meet with a most gracious acceptance, and our desires be complied with, so far as they are consistent with our own happiness— Our Father, who is in heaven, is ever more ready to hear than we to pray, and is wont to give more than we can either desire or deserve.

Is it not then our greatest happiness that we have so beneficent a parent, in whose wisdom, goodness and power, we have an unfailing resource—who knows our necessities before we ask, and prevents our ignorance in asking?—To this gracious being we may apply ourselves under all the various exigencies of life, and, *believing, we shall receive.*

The

The advantages of prayer are evidently great: For, is it not by this means that we lay open our wants to our Almighty Father, and implore the continuance of his care and protection? When we retire from the cares and attentions of the day, do not we by this seek forgiveness of those human infirmities from which no circumspection can secure us?—Do not we engage the divine assistance against future temptations?—and recommend ourselves to the care of that watchful providence, whose eye can pierce through the netter darkness?—Again, when we rise from a state of insensibility to resume the employments of life, do not we by this means solicit the protection of the Almighty, and commit our safety to his gracious care?

Prayer,

S E R M O N VII. 129

Prayer, exclusive of every other advantage, is itself a great preservative from sin; for it would be absurd to suppose we should address that Being for his favour, to whose laws we paid not a due obedience.

Let, then, the advantages of prayer be the greatest imaginable, they can only be so to the righteous. *The praying of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*: It is even an insult on his knowledge, and a defiance of his power. The prayer of penitence, however, must be excepted: for that, as a forgiving and a compassionate Father, he is ever ready to receive.

Can the utility of prayer, then, any longer be doubted?—Lives there a

good man that would be deprived of this comfortable, this inestimable privilege? Is there even a wicked man who could bear to be informed, that he should never be permitted to address his offended God?—The piety of the first would languish, unassisted and unenlightened by this divine intercourse—The wretched situation of the last would involve him in despair, when deprived of all attainable means of reconciliation.

May we evermore avail ourselves of these reflections, and offer up our prayers in an acceptable time!

S E R M O N VIII.

The Danger of a false Confidence in Religion.

I C O R. X. 12.

*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed
lest he fall.*

PERHAPS there is nothing more dangerous in the great business of our salvation than a mistaken confidence.

He who goes on in an uninterrupted course of wickedness, and hardens himself in the pursuit of conscious villainy, is, indeed, to all appearance, in a wretch-

ed situation—Yet his condition, however dangerous, is not desperate: The repeated efforts of conscience may awake him to a sensibility; sickness or misfortune may break the way for reason; the sense of present calamities may subdue, or the prospect of future punishment alarm him.—But what shall convince that man of his danger, who thinks himself already secure?—who believes that his conduct is agreeable to his duty, and that *his feet are in the way which leadeth to life*? It would be vain to point out a precipice to the traveller who can see nothing but an even prospect, or to warn the pilot of a rock, who pursues his passage with invincible confidence. Yet as the traveller may sometimes be deceived by his eye, and as the pilot may
be

be misled by his chart, so it is possible for a man, in his great journey from this world to the next, to be mistaken when he thinks himself in the right path, and to wander far from *the narrow way that leadeth to life.*

I would therefore, upon this occasion, endeavour to point out some of the most prevailing causes of a false confidence in religion, to discover those means by which the heart is flattered into a mistaken security, and to enquire upon what grounds we may entertain a reasonable hope of our salvation.

I. To discover all the causes of religious security would, indeed, be too hard a task—a task to which his powers alone are adequate, who can trace the human

human heart through all its recesses ;
who can perceive the principles of action,
however speciously dress'd, and read the
language of the soul in every character.

It must be in the last degree difficult
to judge of the motives by which others
are conducted, since we are sometimes so
far deceived in ourselves, as to mistake
the principles of our own actions.

But admitting the impossibility of
finding out all the means by which men
are flattered into a mistaken confidence
in religion, some of them are neverthe-
less sufficiently obvious.

Amongst the attributes of the Divine
Power, none is more frequently admired,
none so much attended to as his mercy.

We

S E R M O N VIII. 135

We contemplate this perfection of the Godhead, with an interesting pleasure—we bless the generosity that is industrious in the dispensation of unmerited favours, and adore that benevolence which supports our weakness and bears with our frailties—And with reason we adore—But while we hourly experience the divine Goodness, and constantly rely upon it—when, notwithstanding our follies and our errors, we find ourselves supported by the Supreme Benevolence, we are apt to forget that there are faults which the clemency of heaven cannot connive at, and that there is a conduct which infinite mercy, consistently with justice and wisdom, cannot accept—what we ought to look upon only as the forbearance of that gracious Being, *who is not willing that any should perish*, we conclude to be

an invariable principle of mercy, that will exert itself in producing the same effects for ever. Upon this mistaken conclusion, not only he, who expects salvation on his own terms, builds his hopes, but he who has no other view, than the uninterrupted pursuit of wickedness, founds his daring confidence.

“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore are the hearts of the children of men fully set in them to do evil.”

Another species of false security, and not less prevalent than that which has been already mentioned, arises from a partial obedience. It is in the duties of religion, as in the business of the world; we are willing to obtain what we want

with

with as little trouble as possible; and indulge a desire equally vain and unreasonable, to enjoy, at the same time, the pleasures of idleness, and the rewards of industry*—Yet not indolence alone, not merely an unwillingness to undergo the active labours of religion makes us content ourselves with a partial performance of our duty—we have generally some favourite passion to indulge, which is not altogether consistent with the strict precepts of christianity; and, like the simple Assyrian, who begged that, when he accompanied his master to the worship of his Gods, he might be permitted at least to bow the knee to RIMMON, we reserve an indulgence for our favourite foible—we reserve it, I say, and we ex-

* *Næ illi falsi sunt qui res diversissimas pariter expectant ignavia voluptatem & præmia virtutis.*

SALLUST.

ercise

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ercise it, frequently, without the Assyrian's modesty, or so much as saying, "Lord pardon thy servant in this thing."

Hence it is that, with Agrippa, men are almost persuaded to be Christians. They would settle their portion of duty with heaven, and something, at least, would they do to be saved. They will give up part of their time, I had almost said, part of their thoughts too to the business of religion, and the service of God; but no sooner are the formal moments over than they return, with an ardor which discovers their pleasure in the change, to their schemes of interest or amusement. They are willing, or rather their fear makes them think it necessary to embark in the service of religion, but, such is their attachment to the earth on which they grew, they only coast

SERMON VIII. 139

coast along—they have not spirit enough to venture out to sea, nor fortitude to leave the shades, and the flowers of the shore.

We are, indeed, all various and uncertain creatures, and it is not, therefore, to be wondered, if we want resolution to execute even the most important things. In our early years we are very inconstant. We determine in the ardor of exulting spirits, without considering either the difficulty of the process, or the remoteness of the event. If we, casually, think of religion, we form schemes for a life of piety and devotion, in consequence of a sudden impulse, or a transitory rapture. We resolve, without reflecting that our resolutions are the effect of accidental circumstances—they live awhile, and an accident destroys them.

Thus,

Thus, the instruments of chance and passion, we advance towards the maturity of life—The levity of youth may *then*, possibly, subside; but we are *then* only a medley of the several habits we had contracted, and the passions still maintain their dominion, though their objects may be changed.—It rarely happens, however, that religion has any interest in the change; for, as it had seldom engaged our attention in youth, so it still remains but an inferior consideration, and, among the multitude of different engagements, can scarcely obtain it's seventh day.

Divided thus between God and the world, but more, far more, I fear, attached to the latter, we pass through this
state

S E R M O N VIII. 141

state of life; in youth borne away on the unresisted tide of the passions, we cannot judge with the freedom of unbiassed reason; that only is right which flatters the ruling appetite, and the confidence of lasting happiness is founded on a transient inclination.

In age, indeed, that is seldom the case. We have then learned from frequent disappointment that nothing in this world deserves the name of happiness; and from thence we draw this unavoidable conclusion that it is only to be sought in the hopes of another. Of another we have often heard, and of another we have sometimes thought. We have some confused idea that general acts of obedience will qualify us for the attainment

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tainment of *that* happiness, which is promised only to uniform piety, or sincere repentance. To uniform piety we cannot even have any pretence, and repentance is but a melancholy work, which we should, by any means, endeavour to dispense with. On acts of general obedience, therefore, we are dangerously contented to found our hopes of futurity. Still attached to the world, its vanities, and its follies, we satisfy ourselves with a presumptuous expectation, that the Almighty will be pleased with occasional services, and cursory acts of duty.

But is it, indeed, true that God will be served in part? Is it not the heart, the devoted heart, that he requires from us? Is it not he that saith, **GIVE ME THY HEART, MY SON?** — Will then a partial
obe-

SERMON VIII. 143

obedience avail us? Shall there be any variety of interests in his service?—With respect to that part of our duty which relates to him, what is the commandment that we have received?

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God
“ with all thy heart, and with all thy
“ soul; with all thy mind, and with all
“ thy strength.”

Nay we are told, expressly, that it is impossible for us to serve God and the world. The author of our religion himself has given us sufficient information as to this point. He has assured us that our services cannot be divided—that if our hearts incline towards the world, we are servants of the world; if towards God, we are servants of God.

I

In

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In short, *his servants we are, whom we obey.*

May these observations be well considered by those who entertain the dangerous and delusive expectation, that their God will accept of an obedience which flows not from the heart, and those services they tender him rather through fear than love !

As for those whose mistaken confidence is founded on an opinion that the SUPREME MERCY either can not be offended, or can indiscriminately forgive, I must beg their attention to the following considerations.

The goodness of the DIVINE POWER, however extensive, cannot act in opposition to his justice or his truth: Every
attribute

attribute of the SUPREME PERFECTION must be perfect. Justice and truth are his essential attributes; his justice and his truth, therefore, must be perfect.

If we consult his revealed will, with respect to his justice, we shall be informed, that *he will reward every man according to his works*;—that *he is righteous in all his ways*—and that *the judge of all the earth will do right*.

With respect to his veracity, we are told, that *God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent*, or, as it may be more intelligibly rendered, *that he should change his mind*.

It is evident, therefore, that however great the supreme mercy may be, his

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declarations must, in consequence of his truth, be accomplished, and that *he will judge the world in righteousness.*

I would not here be thought inclinable to impress a terror of the divine Power upon you by representing his mercy as less than it really is, or his justice as more rigid—That, as a man, I should have little inclination to do—God knows I have more need of his mercies than my fellow-creatures.—As a preacher of the gospel I should have still less: But let me intreat you to consider, that though the Almighty were merciful beyond all punishment or retribution, would not the very argument on which you build your hopes of impunity make you appear shocking to all sense of natural or moral

excellence? Should not that man be looked upon as a monster who would offend against mercy because he knew it would forgive, and trample on clemency from an assurance, that it would not resent?

If then the folly and danger of a false confidence in religion be so frequent and so obvious, it must be worth our while to enquire upon what grounds we may entertain a reasonable hope of our salvation.

II. Let us remember that man does not now stand in the same relation to God as at his creation! that he is to look upon his Creator as an offended Being, whose laws he has broken, and

to whom he can only be reconciled through the mediation of Jesus Christ—that the mediator has introduced a system of duties, by complying with which alone we shall be entitled to the advantage of that redemption which he purchased by his death: For, though *he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*, yet that very repentance is a qualifying act of duty, and the first fruits of those good works, without which his merits with THE FATHER will not avail us.

In short, if we obey his laws; if we imitate his life; if we believe his doctrines; if we embrace his precepts; and, lastly, if we look up to him as our greatest good, as the object of our affections

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fections and the perfect pattern of our conduct, we may then hope that he will receive us to his mercy, and interpose his services for our frailties, and our sins.

S E R M O N IX.

Affection, Compassion, and
Civility recommended.

I P E T. iii. 8.

Love as brethren; be pitiful, be courteous.

THAT charitable disposition which
Christianity recommends as it's
first principle, comprehends all the
peculiar graces and virtues that distin-
guish the disciples of Jesus.

Hence,

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Hence, the apostle gives it the preference to all other faculties and powers. The mind might be enlightened with the visions of prophecy—The tongue might be informed with every human language—The laws of nature might be inverted at the command of a created Being, and health and life conferred by man that is born to die: But these powers, as they were superior to his capacity, could add nothing to his moral excellence; and, therefore, one portion of charity was greater than these.

It does not appear that the apostles looked upon this as any particular species of virtue, that could be described

by some peculiar, or uniform mode of operation: They must have considered it as a general temper, or disposition of the soul, that gave its colour and principle to every moral action,

This temper was formed by the genius and spirit of Christianity, improved by that divine grace, which was the privilege of the new religion—But why am I attempting a description of charity, which is so admirably described by it's effects in the epistle to the *Corinthians*?—To that I shall refer you, and confine myself to the consideration of those virtues that flow from it, mentioned in the text —

Love as brethren: Be pitiful: Be courteous,

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I. It must always be allowed by the advocates of natural religion, that the precepts of Christianity make the best system of morality in the world. Numberless graces were suggested by the divine Spirit, which would never have been thought of in a mere natural state: None of these is more frequently inculcated than brotherly love; nay, so indispensable was this duty, that it was made the test of every convert's pretensions, and the last argument of the love of God. *By this we know that ye are of God, if ye have love one to another.*

And, indeed, what better proof could there be of a principle of grace in the heart than this *love of the brethren*? What better indication that they were actuated by

by the spirit of him who is love itself? What could more effectually preserve the infant church from the rending fury of sects and schisms, than this harmony of affections, this union of minds? So strictly requisite then, that it was made the test of the true Christian.

But was it necessary in the early state of Christianity, and is it not equally so now? Stands not our holy church in need of the Spirit of unanimity and love, when we see the bigot zeal of popery so industrious on the one hand, and the delusions of fanaticism so successful on the other? Were ever the sacred connections of mutual amity more necessary in the church of *England* than at the present time? In what parish, nay in what village

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lage have not some of her wavering members been deceived by the insinuations of the puritan or the bigot? Have not we seen the labours of these men too successful in creating prejudice and divisions? And is not this in some measure owing to the want of brotherly affection, *the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace?* Were this more effectually cultivated among us, the good shepherd would see fewer stragglers from his fold.

So necessary is this principle of uniting love in the support of religion; nor is it less valuable, or less needful in social life: Mutual affection is not only the best proof of piety, and the principal security from innovations in religion, but the purest source of social duties, and the firmest foundation of moral justice.

Were

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Were every man to consider himself as deriving his existence from one common parent, as connected to the whole species by an eternal relation, and, in consequence of this reflection, to behave to every fellow creature as a brother, would not the second great commandment of the law be most emphatically fulfilled?

And would it not, at the same time, most effectually promote the welfare of society? Would not the life and property of every individual be infinitely the most secure, when from the law of nature, as well as of nations, from the connections of relation, as well as the obligations of moral rectitude, he could claim the assistance and regard of others?

To love as brethren, must, in the consequence, be to act as brethren—No person

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son of humanity would willingly see him who derived his being from the same parents, the partner of the same womb, whom the same affections nursed, for whom the same care provided, in misery or distress. The voice of nature would plead for the wretched, and demand the relief and assistance of a brother. Should the same voice point out every individual to our regard, when would justice bewail the violation of her laws, or misery complain without assistance and redress? Should we consider every fellow-creature as relatively, tho' not absolutely, a brother, how happy must be the effect of such a conclusion! What peace and harmony would run through the system of life! How delightful must be the effect of universal benevolence! Free from the injuries of oppression and the

the insolence of pride, the malignity of envy and the extortion of avarice, how very different would be the face of society! Should the smiles of affection dwell on every aspect, this life should no longer be called the valley of mourning! Should brotherly love glow in every breast, how would it awake every tender passion! how ready would pity be to weep over distress, and pay the sympathizing tear to pain and misery!

II. If we *love as brethren*, we shall, of consequence, *be pitiful*. Let stoic pride shut up the bowels of mercy, and stop the sluices of compassion: a Christian will not be ashamed of the tender sensations of humanity, to *mourn with those that mourn*, and *weep with those that*

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that weep—Jesus wept—The tear that was shed over the sorrows of *Jerusalem*, the prophetic voice of sympathy that mourned its approaching ruin, give us a right to indulge the sensibility of pity, and teach us that such affections are not unwelcome to heaven.

Nay, we are commanded, as well by the author of our salvation as his apostles, to be full of compassion: It is a duty enjoined by religion, as incumbent on humanity: It is this that directs the hand of charity to relieve, and points out to benevolence the objects of assistance. Without this, charity is ostentation, and munificence hypocrisy.

Pity

Pity brings the mind into an humble frame, and makes it susceptible of the impressions of piety and gratitude to the great preserver of men; when the misfortunes of humanity make us sensible of our weakness, and of our dependence on that Being who alone is almighty.

The excellence of this affection is demonstrable in that it is always found in the finest dispositions. If pride fill the breast with obstinacy and arrogance, we may be assured that pity dwells not there. If avarice turn the ear from the complaints of poverty, we may naturally conclude that pity dwells not there.

He whose heart is depraved by the indulgence of irregular appetites, or con-

tracted

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tracted by unsocial vices; is rarely sensible of the emotions of compassion. It is almost peculiarly the growth of the humble, heavenly mind, that is full of benevolence, tenderness and humanity. If we look into the lives of those who have been most renowned for their piety, I believe we shall find few who have not left behind them some extraordinary instances, the effects of this generous sympathy.

Such indeed is the excellence of a compassionate temper, that perhaps there never was a good man, who was not in a great degree distinguished by it.

Its usefulness to society cannot be disputed: If, as we have observed, it be the source of charity; if it direct us to

the relief of misery, and the consolation of distress; if it be feet *to the lame*, or eyes *to the blind*; if its words uphold those that are falling, and if it strengthen the feeble knees—its utility is confessed; and it is, with indisputable propriety, enjoined by the law of religion.

III. Thus necessary and thus useful is that precept of the apostle, *be pitiful*: Nor less useful, or less necessary perhaps is that which immediately follows it, and commands us to *be courteous*—that is, to behave with civility and complaisance to all orders of men; and to pay that deference to every man which his station requires. If it were considered how much the peace of society is preserved by the forms of what we call good breeding, they would not hastily be neglected;

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nor left as useless or superfluous.—Every one is pleased to be treated with the appearance of respect, and no prudent man would therefore refuse to pay it —If pleasure can be communicated at so cheap a rate, no good natured person would neglect the means. Whatever contributes to the good understanding, and mutual respect of social life, ought not by any means to be rejected. There is enough of malignity in human nature to disorder the peace and commerce of mankind, without creating coldness by a studied negligence of civility, or a rude or careless, or perhaps affected contempt of the established and expected forms of politeness. We should endeavour as much as possible to cherish the principle of social benevolence, and, as *St. Paul* says, be in some measure all

things to all men. Whatever may advance the happiness or satisfaction of our neighbour, Christian charity obliges us to offer: Whatever would discompose, or disgust him, we ought, in justice, to avoid, as we might easily conclude, it would be unwelcome to ourselves. To encourage and exhort to respect and amity; to engage mankind in mutual good offices, and to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, seems to have been the view of the apostle, when he enjoined us to love as brethren, to be pitiful, and to be courteous.

It is natural for us, under the influence of great afflictions, to make ungenerous wishes.

To think by every means the approach of death, and to preserve these frail beings

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S E R M O N X.

The Patience of Job, not an imitable Example for Christians.

Preached at a Funeral, 1763.

J O B xiv. 13.

*O that thou wouldest bide me in the grave!
That thou wouldest keep me secret until
thy wrath be past! That thou wouldest
appoint me a set time! and remember me!*

IT is natural for us, under the anguish of great afflictions, to make unnatural wishes.

To shun by every means the approach of death, and to preserve these frail Be-

ings as long as possible, was implanted in our nature by the unerring will of Providence.—Were we so little desirous of life, and so little afraid of death, as to seek and wish for it upon every little uneasiness, the human species would be destroyed, and this world would become a desert, or be inhabited only by savages, by creatures that have neither the knowledge nor the desire of death—The race of man, I say, would *perish from off the face of the earth*; for what human being is so happy that he is not some time or other uneasy.

It was the wisdom of Providence then that ordered it otherwise: For, though the divine power has permitted enough of misery in the world to wean our hearts
from

from it; yet he has given us such an apprehensive fear of death as is sufficient, in general, to reconcile us to this life, still, in the common course of nature, it is brought to an end.

Hence it is that so soon as sorrow vanishes at the appearance of hope; so soon as the languor of sickness is past, or the pain of disappointment is grown older by a day, we begin once more to look forward with cheerfulness, and to *run with patience the race that is set before us.* Such is the general condition of

life; and they who are and have been the happiest of mankind, must acknowledge that the picture bears some resemblance to their own circumstances.

It

It is possible, however, that, in cases of extreme calamity, death may be wished for in earnest. There are some conditions of life so absolutely wretched, that the desire of living would almost seem unreasonable. Who would wish for the continuation of a being to which every day brought the heavy task of misery, and to which *wearisome nights were appointed*? Should we not, under such circumstances, be ready to cry out with the Apostle—*Who shall deliver us from these bodies of death?* or with the afflicted Patriarch, to intreat that we might *be hid from sorrow in the grave*—In some dark and silent mansion of the earth, where we and our miseries might lie down together, and where we should no longer languish at the sight of the sun?

These

These are wishes, which, though inconsistent with the first great law of nature, the preservation of our being, it is, as I have observed, very natural to form under the keen anguish of affliction.

Let us go into the house of mourning, and hear the complaint of the sufferer. Hear him under the agonies of acute pain. Is he not ready to exclaim with the man of Uzz, "Let the
 "grave open for me! and let the jaws of
 "destruction receive her prey! O God!
 "how long wilt thou withhold thy hand?
 "O that I might have my request! and
 "that God would grant me the thing
 "that I long for, even that it would please
 "God to destroy me: that he would let
 "loose his hand and cut me off!"

Those

Those whom chance or charity has brought to the couch of affliction, are no strangers to such language as this.

But could this be the language, you will say, of Job? Could he wish for death, who believed it to be the end of all flesh? Who could say that, *As the cloud is consumed, and vanisheth away: So he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more?* Could he who had no hopes, or, if any, but obscure hopes of immortality, wish for a dissolution of this mortal body, and to be shut up in the chambers of darkness for ever?—But, what then would he have done, had he lived under the glorious light of the Gospel? Would he not have wished, with still greater impatience, *to be dissolved*

salved and to be with Jesus? or, perhaps, with the prospect of the everlasting promises, he might have endured the cross, despising the pain. Possibly, under the influence of Christian fortitude, he might have triumphed over the calamities of time, exulting in the hopes, the glorious hopes of eternity. Probably he would have acknowledged, with the eloquent Apostle, that the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

No doubt such a conduct would have been greater. Human nature never rises to such a glorious pitch of excellence, such an heavenly dignity, as when, imitating the example of our great and god-like master, we bear with patience the evils

evils that are fallen upon us—When from the spirit of pure and chearful piety, we say, “O God, thy will be done,” This is the proper conduct, the reasonable service of a Christian: But to attain to this perfect state of mind, requires no inferior portion either of sense, or grace. It is necessary that we should be able to form a due estimate of life, to balance in an equal scale it's good and evil things, and from thence to draw just reflections concerning it. This philosophical knowledge is requisite; it is expedient; but it is not alone sufficient to inspire us with Christian fortitude. The conclusions of knowledge, and the resolutions of reason will shrink under the blast of affliction, and, without the concurring aid of divine grace, they will

will ineffectually strive to set the heart at ease.

Under those afflictions, therefore, which are incident to our being, let us not, like unhappy Job, importune the Almighty that we may be permitted to lay it down, but rather let us intreat him that he would give us grace and fortitude, to support with patience the lot which has befallen us.

One very powerful reason why we should do this is, that we ourselves are the cause of almost all the misery we endure. What, in general, are the evils we complain of but the consequence of some misconduct, some passion wrong-directed, some bias of the mind, or some weakness

weakness of the body, brought on, by imprudence, by negligence, or by obstinacy? Should we then, thus circumstanced, hazard a desire to rush into the presence of our Almighty Maker? Should we venture to complain of those evils which befall us in the common course of nature? Should we not rather beseech the dispenser of all good things, to remove the burthen from us in the way of his providence, but still that he would permit us to continue in his service, that we might exert that gratitude which is due to him both for our creation, and preservation?

This certainly would be a conduct more becoming a Christian than that of *Job*.

That

That unhappy Patriarch was but a very imperfect example of patience, compared to the author of christianity. When did our divine master utter the impatient exclamations which we find in the book of Job? *Father, said he, if this cup may not pass away from me, unless I drink it, thy will be done.* And yet this cup was a more bitter potion than the man of Uzz was condemned to drink. Remember we not the agonies that he underwent? Remember we not that the dreadful hour, when, previous to his passion, the Evangelist tells us, that *he sweat as it were great drops of blood.* We are assured by those who are skilled in medicinal knowledge, that this could not have been without the most exquisite torment.

torment. And I mention this circumstance to shew you the difference between Christianity and Judaism, when the highest character in the latter appears so incomparably mean, considered under the circumstances of affliction, with the author of the former.

It is from the doctrine and example of Jesus, then, and not of Job, that we are to learn the virtue of patience; and this caution is the more necessary, because when the Old and New Testament come united into our hands, as the inviolable word of God, we are apt to seek the rules of faith equally in the former as in the latter. This, by no means, ought to be. The doctrines of the Old Testa-

S E R M O N X. 177

ment were built upon a very different foundation from those of the New. The conditions of the covenant were changed, and not only the terms of ritual obedience were varied, but the principles of moral duty were infinitely improved. It is from the New Testament alone, therefore, that we are to derive the rules of life, and the precepts of conduct. *He who is in Christ Jesus*, as the Apostle says, that is, he who has been admitted into the Christian church, is a new creature: *Old things are passed away; behold! all things are become new.*

In preaching from a text like this, wherein the author of it quarrels with that being which God had given him, I thought it necessary to observe in what

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manner

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manner a Christian ought to behave under the like circumstances.

But in favour of the person who appointed this text, let us remember how very difficult it is not to wish for death, when life is destitute of every comfort; when it is embittered with sorrow and sickness, with penury and pain.

I have before observed, that to arrive at that great pitch of Christian perfection, which implies an uncomplaining resignation, requires both great parts, and uncommon graces. It cannot, therefore, be the lot of the multitude.

We all know our readiness to complain—and where is the great soul that
suffers

suffers in silence? We must endeavour to imitate those sublime perfections of which our divine Master has given us an example; but let us look with candour and compassion on those suffering brethren who travel night and day thro' the paths of sorrow; who have their bed in darkness, and their pillow on the thorn.

We are all frail and changeable creatures: A perfect character is not in human nature; and he, who dares to say that he is faultless, is a hypocrite, who wants to impose either on his own heart, or on the world, or, possibly, on both.

With respect to the character of the deceased, she appeared to be a pious

and conscientious Christian, who, while she was attentive to the duties of her station, was by no means remiss in those of her religion. It must be remembered to her credit that she was the industrious mother of a family, diligent to provide her household their portion of meat in due season. Thus she united in her own person the characters both of Martha and of Mary, chusing the good part of the one, and the useful part of the other.

She, therefore, who had led such a life, might, with the more propriety, be desirous of that dissolution, by means of which alone she could receive the fullness of those rewards that are laid up for the just.

She

She had, moreover, another motive for this seemingly unnatural desire of death: For she had, not long before her last sickness, buried her husband, an honest and industrious man, who had divided with her the cares and the labours of life.—When she was deprived of the partner of her affections, when she had taken her last leave of him who contributed to her happiness and support, no wonder if she grew weary of a life, that was at the best but solitary and uncomfortable.

Suffer these apologies to plead for the deceased; over whose foibles, whatever they were, charity should throw a veil, while it withholds not that praise which her virtues merited, though those virtues were obscured by an humble station.

For us, who are assembled on this occasion, we cannot but derive instruction from every circumstance that attends it. And it is principally on our account, indeed, that such discourses as these are exercised. To the dead they are nothing. The last offices that are paid to them can only be useful as they are lectures to the living: So far, however, they are certainly of use: For notwithstanding the various *mementos* of mortality that we meet with, notwithstanding that death has established his empire over all the works of nature, through some infatuation or other, we are still apt to forget that we were born to die: We go on from one design to another, we add hope to hope, and lay out plans for the employ-

SERMON X. 183

employment or the subsistence of many years, till life itself is at an end, and we are alarmed by the appearance of the phantom of death, at an hour which we had concluded to be mid-day.

Let us, therefore, *have our loins always girded up, and our lamps burning*, that we may be in readiness to take our journey to that far, far-distant country, from which no spirit returns.

Let us be diligent to procure the favour of that eternal being, whose influence extends over all worlds!

By the light of his countenance we shall walk without trembling through those gloomy regions where all things

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are forgotten; and, when *death itself*
shall be made subject unto him, then shall
 we rise to that immortal inheritance,
 which is promised to our faith, our piety,
 and our patience.

AMONG the numbers that displease
 themselves in vain, there are none
 farther from the road of happiness than
 those who roll unceasingly for the acquire-
 ment of riches. A mind that has the

S E R M O N XI.

The Condition of Poverty
better than that of Riches
abused.

ECCLES. iv. 6.

*Better is an hand-full with quietness, than
both the hands full with travail and
vexation of spirit.*

AMONG the numbers that disquiet
themselves in vain, there are none
farther from the road of happiness than
those who toil insatiably for the acqui-
sition of riches. A mind that has this
bias

bias can seldom be at ease; for the goods of fortune are in a state of perpetual fluctuation, and that man must know but little repose, who rests his hopes on what chance may take away.

Certainly avarice is a species of madness; if madness be nothing more than an absence, or a suspension of reason: For who can be more destitute of reason than he *who chuses the evil, and shuns the good?* Yet such is the conduct of the man who hath *set his heart on the increase of riches.* In a life whose days are *few and evil*, he is hourly adding to that evil by an unnecessary anxiety to make provision for a life that should have many days. The best privilege of wealth would be the enjoyment of quiet, but he forfeits that

quiet

S E R M O N XI. .187

quiet for the acquisition of more: His desires are not bounded by the wants of nature, or the decent conveniencies of life; money is the object of his affections, and while he labours to acquire it, the use of it is forgot.

But though there is no infatuation that takes hold of the human mind, more unaccountably ridiculous than this inordinate love of wealth, it is certain that no vice or folly whatever is more difficult to subdue. When covetousness has once entrenched itself in the heart, it bids defiance to every attack from without, and is equally proof against the solid force of reason, or the lighter weapons of ridicule. It is in vain that a covetous man is made the jest of the liberal, or brand-
ed

ed with folly by the wise—It is in vain to argue with him—it is in vain to preach to him; and 'tis only with a view of securing those from avarice who are yet untainted with it that I mention the miseries of it in this discourse.

The covetous man, I have already observed, is destitute of reason: In his conduct he is evidently so; but as most human beings, and even madmen think that they act agreeably to reason, let us endeavour to find out upon what principles the man of avarice is reconciled to himself.

Doubtless he imagines, like the man of pleasure, that he is in the only way that leadeth to happiness; for the pursuit

of

S E R M O N XI. 189

of that is the first mover with us all. He imagines so, I say, but upon what grounds? He knows that wealth will purchase every outward convenience of life—that it will procure us respect, and set us free from labour: This he concludes, and, so far, he judges rightly—
 “ But it is not a little, says he, that
 “ will do these things; I must have yet
 “ more before I can quietly and com-
 “ fortably sit down to enjoy it—Well;
 “ now I have obtained what I propo-
 “ sed; yet there is one piece of dignity
 “ which I should be glad to have, but
 “ which my fortune will scarcely bear,
 “ therefore I must have yet more, be-
 “ fore I can quietly and comfortably
 “ sit down to enjoy it.” Thus he rea-
 sons with himself, till—he dies—till he

is

is surprized to find that life is at an end, while he is yet only in the way to happiness.

But this mode of reasoning is followed only by one set of the covetous. There are many, who, without any view to future or distant happiness neither have, nor seek any other pleasure than that of hoarding and accumulating. These are far gone in the money-loving madness, and have not even a pretence to justify their conduct by reason. Gold is their idol, and their covetousness is, as the apostle terms it, downright Idolatry. These are equally guilty, but they are not more happy than the wretch I have been just describing; for, like those poor Indians, who give up half their food to their Idols, they go without common necessities.

S E R M O N XI. 191

necessaries to increase their treasure, and
starve themselves to lay up the provi-
sions of life.

It was not so much my design, upon
this occasion, to expose the criminal na-
ture of covetousness, as to prove the mi-
sery that attends it; but as virtue is cer-
tainly a means of happiness, I may ob-
serve that it must be unknown to the
man of avarice; for it is scarce possible
that he should have any virtue. The
social virtues are those which, in their
practice, are most peculiarly delightful;
but what social virtue can a covetous
man be capable of? To relieve the
wants of his fellow-creatures, would be
inconsistent with his principles of sav-
ing—To compassionate their miseries,
to yield them the consolations of a feel-
ing

ing heart—Of that he is equally incapable: For the heart of avarice never feels. The tender sensations of pity, the warmth of social love, the glow of friendship, and the liberal joy that is inspired by the general happiness, he never felt, or desired to feel. His heart, absorbed in the lowest of vulgar passions, the love of glittering earth, knows no other affection, no superior sentiment. To the happiness that is derived from the intercourse of society he is an utter stranger; for he looks for nothing more from his connections with his fellow-creatures than the advancement of his favourite views, the increase of his wealth.

II. Yet, thus miserable as he is, he may possibly think himself happier than the

the poor who is *despised of his neighbour*. If he does, let him go with us a moment into the cottage of humble labour and contented poverty.

What do I hear in this place? the voice of joy! the simple song of chearful innocence! How still, how peaceful is this rustic habitation! Sure this is the dwelling of quietness! She has taken up her abode beneath this humble roof, and *health* and *content* and *chearfulness* are her inmates. Behold! here is a matron following her daily employment, and two smiling children playing by her! See, how her eye is filled with maternal affection! and how she rejoices, while she earns their provision of bread! Behold, now, the good man is returned from the

field, and the humble board is spread for his repast! How plain and simple is his food! a mere sufficiency for the support of nature! 'Tis, indeed, but a *handful*—

But it is eaten in *quietness*. Here is nothing of that superfluity which solicits the palled appetite of luxury: But here is enough for nature: Here is a handful, and she asks no more.

III. From this scene of *humble* happiness, let us go to the dwelling of the rich. Is this a sociable dwelling, or is it a prison?—Behold! we cannot gain admission—the gates are made fast with bolts of iron. This is a sure sign that security is not here; and yet security is the friend of happiness. But who is yonder that walks so pensively, with looks of suspicion?

S E R M O N XI. 195

suspicion? It is the master of the house—he seems disturbed—he saw us approach, and concluded that we were coming to make him poor.

Miserable wretch! what profit hast thou in the abundance that thou possessest? Both thy hands, indeed, are full, but so likewise is thy heart—full of trouble and endless vexation. Or hast thou a moment's peace? How soon is it liable to be destroyed? *The moth and the rust shall corrupt thine unsunned garments,—the thief shall break through and steal thy treasure. A misfortune that which thou wilt never be able to survive; for where thy treasure is there is thy heart also.*

Miserable wretch! Cast away that wealth which is the bane of thy happiness

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ness—Go to that poverty which thou dreatest, and to be happy, first be poor. Strange doctrine this to thee! But *know for all this that* it is just. The poor, whom thou despisest, are happier than thou art.—Didst thou not hear the song of chearfulness, didst thou not see the smile of contented industry, where there was but a *handful*?

Miserable wretch! What a painful, what a troublesome life dost thou lead! Thy servants curse thee—Thy friends forsake thee—Friends did I say? Thou never hadst a friend; but those that might naturally have been thy friends desert thee, and scarce forbear to wish so useless a being dead.

Miserable

SERMON XI. 197

Miserable wretch! In what fordid
 meanness dost thou pass thy days? With
 what jealousy dost thou look upon the
 very cringing dependents that pick up
 a wretched pittance at thy board! And
 are thy nights less painful, or less vexa-
 tious than thy days? Does sleep, un-
 disturbed sleep await thee? Art thou ac-
 quainted with quietness and repose? No
 —these are strangers, to whom *thy* gates
 are not opened. These have no society
 with cares, and fears and perplexities,
 such as thou art exposed to both by day
 and by night. *Better, surely, is a handful*
with quietness, than thy hoarded wealth,
with thy vexation of spirit.

Thus far of avarice, the peculiar
 wretchedness of which the preacher, no

doubt, had in view: But wealth has miseries arising from other causes than covetousness, which render *a handful with quietness* still preferable.

IV. Riches are not *necessarily* productive of evil. Nay, they may be made the means of happiness, when properly managed. They may contribute to the gratification of benevolence, and to the exercise of almost every social virtue. They may be employed in the diffusion of knowledge, or in the relief of indigence; and, when converted to these purposes, they are a real blessing. They increase the happiness of a benevolent temper, and give pleasure to their possessors, while they are useful to society.

But

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But it is seldom that they are employed to these happy and beneficent ends. The right use of them is most commonly perverted, and what might have been a blessing is rendered a curse by the abuse of it.

When riches are made subservient only to pride—when they are employed in foolish vanity, and empty ostentation, what do they produce but *travail and vexation of spirit*? Those who place their happiness in being admired for splendour, will be frequently mortified by negligence, or traduced by envy. We are very unwilling to pay that deference which is expected from us only on the account of magnificence, and, whatever may be the cause of that unwillingness,

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it is certainly very reasonable; for he who hopes to be admired for that which gives him no merit, offers an insult to the reason of him from whom he looks for admiration—But when that admiration is withheld, *vanity* is mortified; and wealth, by being subservient to her desires, brings her only *travail and anguish of spirit*.

As much perverted is the use of riches, when they are employed in the gratification of luxury, and, of consequence, when thus used, they bring nothing but *vexation*.

Those, who, like the prodigal in the Gospel, spend their *substance in riotous living*, lay up for themselves almost all the miseries that are incident to human nature : For what can be more wretched than

than the condition of him who is equally destitute both of health and peace? Whose body is tormented with pain and disease, while his mind is racked with the reflection of guilt and folly?—Yet such generally are the fruits of intemperance.

In these, and in many other respects, may the goods of fortune be abused; and hence that *fore evil under the sun*, viz. *riches given to the hurt of the owners!*

Let us then conclude, with the wise preacher, that a little, with content and quietness, is preferable to *much treasure, and trouble therewith*. Let us be assured that peace of mind, as there can be no happiness without it, is the first thing worth our seeking. If this *quietness* is to be met with more frequently in an
humble

humble than in a high station, let us not be dazzled with false appearances, but conclude that the humble station is the better.

We have seen that riches are frequently a misfortune to those that possess them—we have seen the miseries of avarice, the discontent of vanity, and the pains of intemperance—Should we not then rather avoid than sigh for a condition that might expose us to misery, to discontent and pain?

Let us not flatter ourselves that we should act more wisely than others in situations which we have contemplated but never tried; for no man knows what influence a change of circumstances will have upon him, before that change

change comes to pass. New accessions of fortune bring with them new wants, new sentiments, and new desires; and that man acts with a laudable firmness, who, when he becomes wealthier, does not become worse.

In one word—Let us remember that it is both our duty and our happiness to be contented with the station which Providence has assigned us; and, though we have but a *bandful*, if we possess it in quietness, it is *better than both the bands full, with travail and vexation of spirit.*

SERMON XII.

The Public Utility of charitable Institutions.

Preached at St. Sepulchre's, London,
for the Benefit of the Charity-Girls.
March 26, 1762.

PROV. X. 15.

*The Destruction of the Poor, is their
Poverty.*

OF all the institutions that have done
honour to human virtue, those that
have been established on the principles
of uninterested charity are deservedly the
most

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most distinguished—We may be incited to great actions by a thirst of honour, by an emulation of excellence, or a desire to be recorded in the history of mankind. These are honourable, but they are selfish motives. It is then only that we acquire un sullied glory, when we are virtuous from motives in which self has no concern ; when out of pure benevolence, and the love of human kind, we relieve the indigent, or rescue the oppressed.

It cannot be without peculiar satisfaction that we see our country distinguished by this public-spirited virtue—It must be with the greatest complacency we consider that to be born Britons, is not only to be the heirs of freedom, but to be the sons of benevolence—not only
to

to inherit the liberty which our forefathers have delivered down to us fathered, but to add new virtues to those they have left us, and to be distinguished at once by bravery and beneficence—not only, like them, to *break every yoke*, but to *bind up the broken hearted*, and to *let the oppressed go free*.

To save the poor from the miseries that are entailed upon their unhappy condition, is the first and greatest object of social charity, because it many times happens that their poverty is their destruction.

It is probable, that the wise man had in his eye many different ways, wherein the poverty of the poor might contribute

bute to their destruction; and it may be worth our while, not only as Christians, but as members of the community, to consider in what manner so numerous a part of the public body, as the poor are, may be said to be *destroyed* by poverty. The dangers and difficulties that await the unhappy person who is born to extreme indigence are very many and very great. In a state of infancy, indeed, he is insensible of the miseries that surround him; *then* he knows not that secret anguish which pierces the breast of a father, when he looks upon him as destined to suffer all the hardships he has himself endured; *then* he understands not that painful tear which flows from the eye of a mother, when she beholds him helpless as he leans upon her breast, and fears that

that the following day may not afford them bread. The following day comes, but provision comes not to support it; and the unhappy infant now mixes his tears with those of his wretched parents, tears that fall from the distresses of nature! many such days probably must he suffer, till his parents, overcome by the afflictions of continued want, at last let go their integrity; and give up their hapless offspring into the arms of some infamous stroller, who carries him about to excite compassion, and to justify her idle pretensions to beg. His situation is now most deplorable, while by day he suffers the pain of cold and hunger, that his cries and miserable aspect may add to the success of the wretched mendicant he accompanies, and at night is thrown into some

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some dungeon unregarded, while she intoxicates herself with the profits of the day. In this pitiable state he continues, till the extremes of cold and want put an end to his innocent being; or, if he lives, he probably lives only to further sufferings, with a decrepit body, and a mind uninformed by any thing but what it could gather from scenes of low debauchery.

Thus accomplished, he continues the only business he is acquainted with, the business of begging; or, if he has been trained by his preceptress to the more expeditious way of procuring money, *the science of stealing*, what should deter him from putting it in practice? *His* mind was never tinctured with the pre-

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cepts of justice or religion. He never knew the sense of shame or honesty, or any other moral restraint: And the fear of human punishment will operate very feebly, when opposed by the importunities of want, and when life is possessed of nothing to make it worth his preserving. Thus, in a series of vice and wretchedness, passes his whole life, a misery to himself, and a prejudice to the community in which he had the *misfortune* to be born.

This picture you may possibly think an uncommon one—would to God it were more so than it is! but if it be drawn from truth, it may now be said with equal propriety, as it was of old, that the *destruction of the poor is their poverty*,

Whatever

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Whatever institution, then, is set on foot to prevent these unhappy consequences of indigence, it merits the highest praise; and, as it tends to the benefit of the community, it has a right to the encouragement, not only of individuals, but of the state.

And here I cannot forbear to observe that, in my opinion, all has not been done that might be done towards this useful end. In an ancient republic, famous for the wisdom of its policy, the children of the poor were taken under the protection of the state, and instructed in those arts to which their genius seemed adapted, or their inclinations led them. If *Sparta* could do this and profit by it, surely *Britain* has it in her power. For, as a

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mercantile nation, that must always be possessed of a large naval force, she has much more employment for her youth than ever *Sparta* had, and as she is possessed of very extensive dominions, many of which are uncultivated, she ought to encourage every motive to the increase of population. Add to this, that she has a variety of manufactures, in several branches of which, children may be employed from the first dawn of reason, and taught to earn their bread by their manual labour.

But, to leave these considerations to the wisdom and benevolence of the legislature, let us, according to the abilities that God has given us, labour to prevent those distresses, and that destruction

struction to which the poor are exposed. Let us not merely act the part of idle declaimers, nor content ourselves with being acute speculatists, or ingenious schemers, for one virtue in the heart is preferable to a thousand in the head.

But even the heart too is apt to deceive itself, and while it contains the seeds of many latent virtues, finds some way or other to prevent them from ripening into use. If we find that we are not destitute of general wishes for human happiness; if we applaud the charity of the benevolent, and the hospitality of the liberal; if we join in condemning the niggard hand of the selfish, or the sordid heart of avaritious wealth, we conclude that we are friends to the common welfare;

and while we plead the cause of virtue, number ourselves among her votaries, though we never bear one offering to her temple.—This foible, I am afraid, may be too generally prevalent—and there are few perhaps, who, after a candid attention to their own consciences, may not say, “this has more than once been the case with us.” But, to prevent the delusions of this self-deceiving heart, surely nothing more is necessary than to detect them: When the gate of truth is once discovered, what have we to do but to enter in: *To behold her fair beauty, and to visit her temple!*

To be charitable is a province of virtue that is open to all. We ought, indeed, to esteem it a peculiar happiness that the author of our salvation has made
the

the practical virtues so easy and so obvious, but, at the same time, we should remember, that, in proportion as they are easy, the omission of them will be criminal, and that our *escape* will be the more difficult, if we have neglected to do what might so readily have been done.

If the thing be maturely considered, there is scarce any excuse to be made for the neglect of charitable contribution; for as all, who are not themselves objects of charity, have it in their power, so the duty is equally incumbent on all. But it frequently happens that people of moderate fortunes recommend it to the wealthy, and the wealthy, to be even with them, leave it to the care of people of moderate fortunes. The former think themselves exempted from a duty which

seem more particularly to belong to the opulent, and the latter, wrapt up in the security of independent affluence, think that the cares of virtue, like all others, may be left to those who were born to labour. The mistake is very unfortunate on both sides : And both will find at last, to their mortification, that neither riches can place us above the social duties of life, nor the want of them below them. The rich man shall perceive that he was mistaken, when he thought wealth his strong hold, and he, who supposed himself excused from charity, by being comparatively poor, shall find, that his poverty was not his virtue.

With respect to the institution of charity schools in particular, and the encouragement that they deserve, it may be expected that I should advance some arguments ;

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guments; and, indeed, many might be advanced, but so much has upon all occasions been said in their behalf, and so little against them, that it may be justly thought superfluous; for, whatever will admit of the most arguments in its favour, certainly wants them the least. As to all that has been urged against them by the author of the Fable of the Bees, it is mere ingenious sophistry, the stale method of exposing all the foibles to which any institution is liable, and passing, with sacred silence, over every thing that is valuable or excellent in it. Such sophists deserve not to be answered, but with the contempt they deserve they ought to be mentioned.

To you, who have been long convinced of the utility of these establishments,

I am

I am persuaded, there is no occasion to use arguments in defence of them; yet if arguments were necessary, they might all be concentrated in these short positions, viz. whether, in a Christian state, it were more proper that the children of the poor should be Christians or barbarians; naked or cloathed; instructed to earn their bread by the arts of honest labour, or brought up in idle ignorance to become a burthen to the community.

To you, whose BENEVOLENCE is founded on the principles of *reason*, I am satisfied, there is still *less* occasion for eloquence than for argument—yet, if eloquence were necessary, behold it there * ! Behold the supplicating looks of helpless innocence!—how powerfully

* Referring to the children.

they

they plead ! what rhetoric can move like the distresses of innocence ? If our tenderness is not awaked by those, will it yield to the power of words ; to the animated colours of strong description, or the tuneful flow of polished periods ? Yes, ye poor daughters of sorrow ! born to no hope but the humanity of your fellow-creatures, your own miseries shall plead your cause—your own unhappy circumstances shall excite compassion in every *gentle* breast, shall call forth the tear from every *tender* eye, shall open every *generous* hand to contribute to your relief. We know that your resources are small, that the capital which supports you is extremely reduced, and that, for the principles of a virtuous and useful education, you depend, in a great measure, on the liberality of this

9

audience.

audience. On their munificence you depend for those instructions that must save you from folly and from vice, and those industrious arts which must be your future support.

What joy must it be to every good mind, on such an affecting occasion, to exercise it's benevolence! to indulge the sweetest of all passions, *the tender delight of pity!*

Let us, my friends, prove ourselves not to be destitute of humanity, by indulging it on the occasion before us.

Let us invest the fleeting possessions of this world in the happy security of immortal life! Let us lay up our treasures in that safe repository, which is free from the inroads of the robber, and the rust

of

of time! The works of charity alone are immortal. Other virtues shall die. Other excellencies shall decay with decaying nature. Dignity and learning, and arts, and honours shall not outlast the beating pulse, nor survive the ruins of the grave. *Whether there be tongues, they shall fail; whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away,* but charity shall live for ever—secure in the favour of that unchangeable being, who has pronounced it the best of human virtues. To obtain the favour of that Being, how great were the emulation! What were the sacrifice of life or honour, of power or affluence, to be repaid by his supreme rewards! To receive the last, best gift of immortality from the divine bounty, and to be lodged in the bosom of everlasting

lasting love! when the cares and fears,
and sorrows that surround us are no
more——*then* to exchange these regions
of pain and poverty for the glorious in-
heritance of eternal life; when the Son
of God himself shall repeat his invita-
tion, saying, “Come ye blessed children
“ of my Father, receive the kingdom
“ prepared for you from the beginning
“ of the world; for I was hungry and
“ ye gave me meat, thirsty and ye gave
“ me drink, a stranger and ye took me
“ in, naked and ye clothed me.”

END of the FIRST VOLUME.

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